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# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

or AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896

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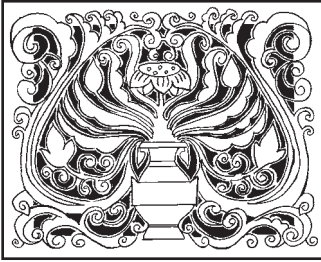


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Vol. 113, No. 6  
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Amrita Kalasha

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# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत । *Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!*

## **Brahmacharya: Studentship**

June 2008  
Vol. 113, No. 6

वेदमनूच्याचार्योऽन्तेवासिनमनुशास्ति । सत्यं वद । धर्मं चर ।  
स्वाध्यायान्मा प्रमदः । आचार्याय प्रियं धनमाहृत्य प्रजातन्तुं मा व्यवच्छेत्सीः ।  
सत्यान्न प्रमदितव्यम् । धर्मान्न प्रमदितव्यम् । कुशलान्न प्रमदितव्यम् ।  
भूत्यै न प्रमदितव्यम् । स्वाध्यायप्रवचनाभ्यां न प्रमदितव्यम् ॥

Having taught the Vedas, the preceptor thus instructs the pupil: 'Speak the truth. Practise righteousness. Do not neglect study. Having offered the teacher the wealth desired by him (enter the householder's life and see that) the line of progeny is not cut off. Do not swerve from the truth. Do not swerve from righteousness. Do not neglect (personal) welfare. Do not neglect prosperity. Do not neglect learning and teaching.' (*Taittiriya Upanishad*, 1.11.1)

इयं समित् पृथिवी द्यौर्द्वितीयोतान्तरिक्षं समिधा पृणाति ।  
ब्रह्मचारी समिधा मेखलया श्रमेण लोकांस्तपसा पिपर्ति ॥

This piece of fuel is earth, sky the second; also the atmosphere he fills with fuel. The Vedic student fills the worlds with fuel (sacrifice), girdle (study), toil, and discipline.  
(*Atharva Veda*, 11.5.4)

पुराकल्पे तु नारीणां मांजीबन्धनमिष्यते ।  
अध्यापनं च वेदानां सावित्रीवचनं तथा ॥

In olden times, investiture with the (sacred) girdle was prescribed for girls (during initiation into the Brahmacharya Ashrama), as was instruction in Vedic studies, and initiation into the Gayatri mantra.  
(*Harita*)

उपाध्यायान्दशाचार्य आचार्याणां शतं पिता ।  
सहस्रन्तु पितृन्माता गौरवेणातिरिच्यते ॥

The teacher is ten times more venerable than an instructor, the father a hundred times more than the teacher, and the mother a thousand times more than the father.  
(*Manu Samhita*, 2.145)

लालयेत् पञ्च वर्षाणि दश वर्षाणि ताडयेत् ।  
प्राप्ते तु षोडशे वर्षे पुत्रं मित्रवदाचरेत् ॥

The son is to be brought up lovingly for the first five years of his life, and disciplined for the next ten years; but when he reaches sixteen, he must be treated as a friend.

# THIS MONTH

**The First Steps** taken by a child on the pathway of education are of great importance. They determine the direction in which he or she is likely to walk in future. The demands of parenting young children can cause parents and children considerable strain. This number discusses the reasons as also possible solutions.



The religious beliefs and spiritual outlook of children are often shaped by their families, and samskaras, or religious rites, serve as means for cementing this outlook. Swami Brahmeshanandaji, Secretary, Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh,

discusses the importance of spirituality in family life and how spiritual values can be inculcated through proper samskaras in **The Spiritual Family**.

The family comprises a web of relationships which are constantly being subjected to internal and external stresses. When these stresses threaten to undermine relationships, it is probably time to seek help. This is suggested by Dr Bharat Desai, Counsellor, Manomitra Counselling Centre, Ramakrishna Math, Pune, in **Counselling for Healthier Family Relationships**.

Traditional insights have been the bedrock of parenting over the millennia. But the disappearance of the joint family and the increasing breakdown of family ties has left young parents with little parenting know-how to fall back on. Ms Astha Parmar, who is pursuing a master's degree in organizational psychology at Seattle Pacific University, argues for recovering these insights and combining them with the latest pedagogical knowledge in **Challenges of Parenting**.

The WINGS Counselling Centre of the Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore, is a pioneer of school-based counselling services in Singapore. Dr Pushpa Bose, director of the centre, discusses some psychological issues relevant to childhood and provides useful guidelines on parenting in **Counselling: When Do Children Need Our Help?**

Hema Gurnani, Counsellor, WINGS Counselling Centre, Singapore, provides an outline of some common behavioural problems of childhood and how these are to be approached in **Counselling for Young Children**.

**East-West Dialectic and Swami Vivekananda** is Swami Bhavaharanandaji's brief review of Swami Vivekananda's role in the efforts at bridging the horizontal global divide. The author is a monastic member of Belur Math.

Pravrajika Brahmapranaji of the Sarada Convent, Hollywood, concludes her study of **Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta** with a discussion of various approaches to consciousness leading to a clear vision of Reality.

**Ethics, Universalism, and Spirituality** are inextricably linked. Genuine spirituality is grounded in ethical behaviour and reflected in a universal outlook, argues Dr V V Rampal, former senior scientist, Defence Research and Development Organization.



**Girishchandra Ghosh: As an Actor (1867–1879)** is Swami Chetanandaji's appraisal of a pioneering figure in Bengali Drama. The author is Minister-in-Charge, Vedanta Society of St Louis.

## EDITORIAL

# The First Steps

‘NOTHING could be more perfect educationally than the *bratas* [sacred observances] which Hindu society has preserved and hands to its children in each generation, as first lessons in worship, ... in the practice of social relationships, or in manners,’ wrote Sister Nivedita, a hundred years ago.

Some of these *bratas*—like that which teaches the service of the cow, or the sowing of seeds, or some which seem to set out on the elements of geography and astronomy—have an air of desiring to impart what we now distinguish as secular knowledge. ... But for the most part, they constitute a training in religious ideas and religious feelings. As such, their perfection is startling. They combine practice, story, game, and object, with a precision that no Indian can appreciate and enjoy as can the European familiar with modern educational speculation. India has, in these, done on the religious and social plane, what Europe is trying, in the Kindergarten, to do on the scientific.

### Garden of Children

Most of us are familiar with the Kindergarten system developed by Froebel, having passed through one version or the other of this educational method as young children. What we are decidedly less aware of is the fact that many of the time-tested cultural mores—practices that are fast falling into disuse—reflect educational insights that are as profound as those incorporated in educational techniques presently in vogue. Sister Nivedita adds:

The Kindergarten lessons of Europe, then, might be described as a series of *bratas*, designed to launch the child’s mind on a knowledge of science. Like the religious *bratas* of India, they deal, in the first place, directly with concrete objects.

These objects are introduced by means of stories. In the course of the lesson, or ‘play’—or *brata* as it might be called—some definite act is performed repeatedly. And finally, in the highly-perfected lesson, the result is a game, consisting of a song set to music, to be sung by the children, henceforth, in action. These four parts, then, story, object, action, and the resultant game, make up the typical child-garden exercise. By their means, the mind of the learner is made to go through a definite sequence of experiences, on which a higher sequence may be constructed later. ... And the problem of child-education is so to use the typical *brata* as to initiate by its means in the learner, an ordered consciousness of place, time, quantity, form, causation, and the rest.

The will and the imagination have been at the focus of much of the pedagogical innovation for children that has taken place over the last century. Most parents are anxious to have their children behave in ways that conform to the norms of society and meet their own expectations of them. This parental demand is matched by the largely didactic nature of much of the educational material that is produced for children. But children can be very averse to moralizing. Successful children’s literature makes intelligent use of animistic and magical representations and concrete or realistic imagery to make abstract concepts interesting and comprehensible for children. The *niti-katha*, or fable, exemplifies this methodology, and the *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesha* are archetypal representatives of this genre.

### The Wise and the Carefree

*Niti* implies prudent or wise behaviour. It ‘presupposes that one has considered, and rejected, the possibility of living as a saint,’ as Arthur Ryder puts

it. 'It can be practised only by a social being, and represents an admirable attempt to answer the insistent question: how to win the utmost possible joy from life in the world of men.' And this calls for discrimination:

For if there be no mind  
 Debating good and ill,  
 And if religion send  
 No challenge to the will,  
 If only greed be there  
 For some material feast,  
 How draw a line between  
 The man-beast and the beast?

*Niti* implies harmonious human development, 'a life in which security, prosperity, resolute action, friendship, and good learning are so combined as to produce joy'. The world of the *Panchatantra* and *Hitopadesha* is peopled by archetypal animals: Rusty, the strong but dim-witted lion, the crafty jackals Victor and Cheek, the stupid heron, and the hypocritical cat. 'The animal actors present, far more vividly and more urbanely than men could do, the view of life [t]here recommended.'

Another class of children's literature aims at stimulating the imagination and expansion of emotions rather than at acculturation. It values fantasy and nonsense for its own sake. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* typifies this genre. 'It is the most wonderful book for children that has been written in this century,' observed Swami Vivekananda.

When I read it, I was delighted; it was always in my head to write that sort of a book for children. What pleased me most in it was what you think most incongruous, that there is no connection there. One idea comes and jumps into another, without any connection. When you were children, you thought that the most wonderful connection. So this man brought back his thoughts of childhood, which were perfectly connected to him as a child, and composed this book for children. And all these books which men write, trying to make children swallow their own ideas as men, are nonsense. We too are grown-up children, that is all. The world is the same unconnected thing—*Alice in Wonderland*—with no connection whatever.

The value of the smile that such literature allows us at all ages is best highlighted by the plight of the griffonling in Sukumar Ray's *Select Nonsense*:

The griffonling from birth  
 Is indisposed to mirth.  
 To laugh or grin, he counts a sin  
 And shudders, 'Not on earth'.  
 He's always in a jitter  
 Lest you should laugh or titter,  
 And peers around, at every second  
 With visage grim and bitter.

### Learning Transcendence

But neither worldly wisdom nor unrestrained flights of fancy can be the source of lasting fulfilment. The culture of transcendence demands that the will and imagination be coordinated in the search after the deeper dimensions of our being. And Dhruva best exemplifies this search: 'At last he reached the heart of the forest. Then came one with great fiery eyes, and hot breath, and swinging tail. Dhruva did not know who it was. He went up to him eagerly. "Are you the Lotus-Eyed [Vishnu]?" he asked. And the tiger slunk away ashamed. Next came something with heavy footsteps and deep dark fur. "Are you the Lotus-Eyed?" asked Dhruva. And the bear too slunk away ashamed. Still the child heard the voice of the Lotus-Eyed in his heart, saying, "Come! Come!" And he waited.'

The sage Narada initiated Dhruva into formal meditation on Vishnu and Dhruva plunged himself into practice. Even when anthills came up on his body, he never stirred, 'for deep in his own heart Dhruva had found the Lotus-Eyed, and he had come to rest for ever'.

The *Markandeya Purana* records the inspiring tale of Queen Madalasa, who would sing to her newborn infant the great Vedantic truths even as she rocked its cradle: 'Thou art the Pure One, the Stainless, the Sinless, the Mighty One, the Great One.' 'If I had a child I would from its very birth begin to tell it, "Thou art the Pure One",' said Swami Vivekananda. There could hardly be a better way to begin one's education.



# The Spiritual Family

Swami Brahmeshananda

SOME time back, a devotee who has been associated with the Ramakrishna Ashrama, Chandigarh, for more than thirty-five years and is now seventy years of age, requested us to build a senior citizens' home at the ashrama so that she and her husband could pass their last days peacefully in a spiritual atmosphere. Their children are married and settled abroad. They visit India once every few years to spend some days with the parents. Earlier, the parents too used to make family visits abroad, but are presently unable to do so frequently or freely because of age.

This is all too common a tale among upper middle class families today: married children settled abroad and old parents left alone in India—in big houses, lacking the safety and emotional support provided by children as also the joy of being with grandchildren. It is not the parents alone that suffer; in many cases the children are not any better off either. Having opted for material prosperity and monetary gains, they lose out on mental peace. The young grandchildren are also deprived of the joy of being with their grandparents and receiving their nurturing care.

Joint families are now largely a thing of the past. A year ago, I visited a household of four brothers living with their parents under the same roof at Akola. While each family had its own bedroom, the entire household shared a common kitchen as well as dining and drawing rooms. There was also a recent news report about a village in Punjab where a hundred members of a single family—including great grandparents—live together in shared houses. They have buses instead of cars for transport! The newsworthiness of such households only underlines their rarity.

Nuclear families are the rule now. If the breakdown of joint families has been tragic, a more un-

fortunate development is the breakdown of nuclear families, with the rising incidence of divorce. This development has appeared inevitable, much like the splitting up of the atomic nucleus that followed the human ability to smash up atoms.

In their essay, 'The Diseases of Gods: Some Newer Threats to Health' in the third edition of the *Oxford Textbook of Medicine*, M H King and C M Elliott observe:

There are also signs that even 'normal' family life is deteriorating; a study in the United States found that fathers only spend 40 seconds a day interacting with their children. ... Every year now 150 000 British children under 16 are added to the number who experience the divorce of their parents; on present trends a quarter of all children will be subject to its short- and long-term effects. ...

It is not that individual children from single-parent families cannot prosper, but that well into adult life, they do worse *on average* than those from traditional families in every dimension in which they are measured—physically, emotionally, behaviourally, educationally, economically, and in terms of smoking and drinking. ... They die earlier, do less well at school, are less well nourished, suffer more unemployment, and are more prone to deviance and crime. They ... run a higher risk of physical and psychological ill health.

Let us contrast this situation with the traditional Indian family system. The life of a Hindu was divided into four stages or ashramas—Brahmacharya, Grihastha, Vanaprastha, and Sannyasa—which were meant to guide the individual from an original state of unculture and indiscipline to the final stage of total emancipation or moksha. This was done through a series of samskaras. Samskaras, in this context, are rites or practices meant to help people imbibe a sense of duty and obligation during the



*A second birth:  
entering the  
Brahmacharya  
Ashrama*

various stages of life. An individual is born uncultured, *janmana jayate shudrah*. It is through samskaras that he or she gets a second birth, *samskarat dvija uchyate*. Hindu sages were well aware that the human mind is extremely restless and has a proclivity for unrestrained sense enjoyment. Left unchecked, such a tendency ultimately leads to ruin. Hence they introduced a number of discerning measures in the form of samskaras to regulate such tendencies. The number of important samskaras, as prescribed by traditional texts, varies from eleven to forty, but sixteen have traditionally been considered particularly important. As many as nine samskaras were recommended even prior to the individual's entry into formal student life or the Brahmacharya Ashrama, marked by the *upanayana* ceremony. These samskaras evoke spiritual feelings which are conducive to the maintenance of high moral standards. They purify the mind and heart by inculcating truthfulness, purity, and generosity. They create an urge for ethical living and righteousness. They act as signboards on the path of life, thus helping eliminate confusion at the crossroads of life. Samskaras mitigate evil tendencies, instil values, and socialize the individual.

### **The Important Samskaras**

The first samskara is Garbhadhana or conception. It

consists of fervent prayers by the parents for begetting a child. Scriptural hymns are recited by husband and wife, together with prayers for mutual love, kindness, compassion, cooperation, and happiness in married life. The second samskara is Pumsavana or 'quickening a male child'. Usually performed in the third or fourth month of pregnancy, this ritual originally involved prayers for a male offspring, but in the present-day context is to be seen as a supplication for protection of the conceptus and invocation of divine qualities in the foetus. This samskara is also meant to create a spiritual atmosphere at home. It is followed by Simantonnayana, parting of hair. This consists of prayers for the healthy physical and mental growth of the child in the womb and is performed around the seventh month of pregnancy. The mantras give a sense of joy, dignity, and self-confidence to the expectant mother, who is advised to dwell on thoughts of nobility, goodness, and divinity and eat wholesome and pure, or sattvic, food. Jatakarma or birth ceremony is the fourth samskara. The newborn child is ritually welcomed into the family with recitation of mantras and prayers for his or her long life. The child is also fed a little ghee and honey amidst sacred pronouncements or *vyahritis* as symbolic promoters of intelligence. Namakarana, naming, is the next samskara. The name is so selected that its meaning inspires the child to follow the path of righteousness. Names of deities and those suggestive of divine qualities have traditionally been preferred. Nishkramana, moving out of the maternity room with the mother; Annaprashana, taking cereals for the first time; Mundana, tonsure; and Karanavedha, piercing the ear lobes, follow one after the other for the growing child. The first shave, which is usually undertaken when a boy is around sixteen, is also a samskara: Keshanta.

All of these samskaras are but preparations for the educational samskaras: Vidyarambha, beginning of primary education; the all-important Upanayana, formal entry into the Brahmacharya Ashrama; and Vedarambha, beginning of Vedic studies. Traditionally, the young brahmacharin is expected to live with the guru as an *antevasin*, or



resident member of the household. He is supposed to lead a life of rigorous discipline, study, training, and service. He starts wearing the sacred thread consisting of three strands symbolizing three debts—to gods, sages, and ancestors—and the three forms of restraint: physical, verbal, and mental. During this stage, the growing youth equips himself for the future life of a grihastha. On completion of education, the student returns home following a convocation ceremony called Samavartana. The acharya himself performs the ceremony, giving the pupil important instructions about the ideal householder's life. The Brahmacharya Ashrama had lost much of its significance for women in the middle ages, but with the revival of women's education in modern times has again assumed great importance for both sexes.

Vivaha or marriage is the next samskara. It marks the individual's entry into the second of the four ashramas: Grihastha. This ashrama is the foundation for all the other ashramas, and also of the family. The institution of marriage is given great importance in Hindu culture. Most of the deities that Hindus worship—Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma, Rama, and Krishna, for instance—are married. Also, divine couples like Shiva and Parvati or Sita and Rama are taken by Hindu couples to be their ideals. The poet Bhavabhuti describes the sanctity of intimate conjugal relationship in his *Uttara-rama-charita*. There Rama tells Lakshmana: 'One in happiness and misery; favourable to each other under all circumstances; in which intimate relationship the heart obtains repose and rest; where there is no diminution of sweetness even in old age; which does not break down with the passage of time, since it is grounded in love—such ideal conjugal relationship (which exists between Sita and me) comes to the lot of a fortunate few.'

The Hindu marriage ceremony is an elaborate ritual. One of the important components of this ritual is the *saptapadi* or 'rite of seven steps'—the marriage vows taken by the bride and the groom, while going north of the nuptial fire. The following is a free rendering of the mantras recited with each step:

With God as Guide let us take  
The first step to nourish each other,  
The second step to grow together in strength,  
The third step to preserve our wealth,  
The fourth step to share our joys and sorrows,  
The fifth step to care for our children,  
The sixth step to be together for ever,  
The seventh step to remain lifelong friends—  
Perfect halves to make a perfect whole.

Vanaprastha, the next stage of life, is meant to be a preparatory step towards final renunciation. In this ashrama the couple renounces worldly attachments and spends increasingly more time in spiritual practices. Sannyasa is the final ashrama—the fourth and the final stage of life—marked by complete renunciation and total dedication to spiritual pursuits. The renunciant goes beyond all samskaras. For others, the funeral or Antyeshti is the final samskara. It is performed by the descendants of the deceased.

The performance of samskaras creates an atmosphere conducive to the training of the mind. The samskaras remove mental dross (*malapanayana*) and inculcate values (*atishayadhana*), and make responsible citizens of individuals. They direct the mind to the path of righteousness, truthfulness, compassion, kindness, and generosity. Performance of these rites creates a divine environment that is spiritually uplifting and provides an opportunity for family members, friends, and relations to get together and invigorate their kinship. They leave deep impressions in the subconscious mind—even of infants and small children—and guide people through their lives, protecting against evil and encouraging the pursuit of goodness.

### **Rethinking the Brahmacharya Ashrama**

We have discussed the picture of an ideal life in the Hindu family tradition. To sustain these lofty traditional ideals in the present social setup, heavily influenced as it is by hedonistic materialism, is the big challenge. First, it is important to realize the great need for rejuvenation of the family system—both cultural and spiritually—not only for India, but for

the whole world. Swami Vivekananda has said:

Shall India die? Then from the world all spirituality will be extinct, all moral perfection will be extinct, all sweet-souled sympathy for religion will be extinct, all ideality will be extinct; and in its place will reign the duality of lust and luxury as the male and female deities, with money as its priest, fraud, force, and competition its ceremonies, and the human soul its sacrifice. Such a thing can never be. The power of suffering is infinitely greater than the power of doing; the power of love is infinitely of greater potency than the power of hatred. Those that think that the present revival of Hinduism is only a manifestation of patriotic impulse are deluded.

Today, numerous young Indians are travelling, and also settling down, abroad. It is important that they carry Indian cultural values with them, especially the ideal of the spiritual family. This ideal is urgently needed by the rest of the world too, with its large-scale breakdown of the traditional family system. The family is the unit of society and if it breaks down, society breaks down as well.

It is obvious that, for family values to survive, proper education and a suitable cultural ambience are required; and these are provided by the *samskaras* and the system of *ashramas*. Therefore, we need to realize the great importance of the *samskaras* and reintroduce them wherever and whenever possible. The value of strong and healthy *Brahmacharya* and *Grihastha Ashramas* for a spiritual family cannot be over-emphasized. If we want to foster a cultured and spiritual society, the foundation must be laid in childhood. Of course, this must be done in the light of modern interpretations of traditional texts. The following are some suggestions for the *Brahmacharya Ashrama* in present times.

Children learn more from the conduct than the words of parents. Hence parents need to be mindful of their own character and behaviour if they want their children to learn from them. The impressions left on the mind in childhood last a lifetime. Of paramount importance is the mother's influence, and the culture and education of the mother go a long way in shaping the child's future personality. It

is from the parents that the child learns to behave politely and to pay respect to elders, guests, and teachers. Parents need to be particularly vigilant to ensure that the child does not develop bad habits or fall into evil company, especially at a young age. One of the most difficult tasks before parents today is to protect their children from the disruptive influence of the 'third parent', the TV, which destroys attention and concentration, promotes 'a high resource consuming, and excessively polluting lifestyle', encourages violence, and erodes 'the norms of traditional sexual behaviour and with it the stability of the family'.

It is also the responsibility of parents to choose for their children, if they have the chance, educational institutions which emphasize cultural values and the development of moral and ethical strength. In schools and students' homes too there must be enough discipline to ensure healthy development of personality. One needs to learn lessons in hardship during youth rather than get used to luxury and enjoyment. There is a tendency among parents to follow the current trends and goad their children in the direction in which the majority is moving. But this can be very dangerous. It takes no account of the child's specific aptitudes, which need to be respected. It is the prime responsibility of parents to see that their children attain optimal growth—physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually.

After the completion of their education and before entering the *Grihastha Ashrama*, the youth, especially those belonging to well-to-do families, should spend some years engaged in service activities—preferably to the needy. After all, most of us have been educated at public expense. This would be an apt substitute for the traditional *nri-yajna*—service to humans as a sacrifice—and would help develop dignity of labour.

It goes without saying that one must become financially stable before marriage. It is the duty of the householder to earn and save money. But one must not blindly run after wealth or fall into the trap of unrestrained sense enjoyment.

Regarding marriage, there is no harm if sons and daughters select their partners by themselves, but parents must be ready to offer judicious guidance and advice when needed. There are idealistic youths who are not inclined towards marriage. Parents need to respect their choice. It is, of course, important that such youth be strong enough to lead a life of celibacy and not drift into immoral ways.

Most modern families break down because partners choose to live only at the level of physical relationship, which obviously cannot be deep. It cannot be denied that satisfaction of mutual sexual needs is one of the aspects of marriage. But one must also appreciate that conjugal relationship has higher dimensions and is for a larger social purpose. In the traditional Indian system the main purpose of marriage was to produce strong, healthy, and noble offspring. In such a world-view there is no place for pre- or extramarital sexual relationships. Even in marriage self-control must be practised. Sri Ramakrishna has, therefore, advised that couples should live as sisters and brothers after the birth of one or two children. It is gratifying to note that even in modern India there are people who follow this advice, and there are couples whose sexual relations have *only* been for the sake of progeny and not for enjoyment.

While many of the traditional *samskaras* have become obsolete, several new rituals have taken their place. Well-to-do families celebrate the birthdays of their children. Passing an examination with good rank or getting a good job are also occasions for celebration in the family. Such events could be spiritualized. The family can visit a temple, make offerings, or visit some ashrama and seek the blessings of monks. Consecration of the land before construction of a building (*bhumi-pujana*) and ceremonial entry into a newly built house (*griha-pravesha*) are much in vogue now. Religiously inclined families also try to inculcate religious *samskaras* in their children through such simple acts as bowing down to deities and monks and making offerings to temples and charitable institutions.

We have discussed some of the traditional means

of building sane and healthy families as well as their possible modern counterparts. Each of these, however, has a subjective aspect that must not be overlooked. Swami Vivekananda observes: ‘With everything we do in life we identify ourselves. Here is a man who says harsh words to me. I feel anger coming on me. In a few seconds anger and I are one, and then comes misery. Attach yourselves to the Lord and to nothing else, because everything else is unreal. Attachment to the unreal will bring misery. There is only one Existence that is real, only one Life in which there is neither object nor [subject].’ This was carried into practice by Gopaler Ma, a devotee of Sri Ramakrishna, who looked upon the baby Krishna as her chosen deity. In India, a large number of women—married, unmarried, and widows—consider Krishna or Rama as their child and act accordingly. They bathe the image of their Chosen Deity, clothe it, offer food to it, and lay it down to sleep just as they would do with their young children. Even highly educated and wealthy persons are known to opt for the baby Krishna as their son rather than have a biological son. They decorate their homes with pictures of Krishna and not with those of their ancestors, as is commonly done. A famous expounder of the *Ram-charit-manas* used to book three tickets while travelling by train: one for himself, another for his attendant, and the third for Ramabhadra—his Chosen Deity, Rama. On the berth reserved for Ramabhadra, he would place Rama’s photo with the perfect consciousness that the deity was actually travelling with him! Of course, this was possible in the days when trains were not overly crowded. Such methods of spiritualizing one’s life might be ‘passing away, never to return’, and we may have to look for other means. One such powerful method has been shown by Swami Vivekananda in his famous exhortation to look upon all humans as divine: ‘Look upon every man, woman, and every one as God. You cannot help anyone, you can only serve: serve the children of the Lord, serve the Lord Himself, if you have the privilege.’ We would be doing well in putting this advice into practice.





# ***Counselling for Healthier Family Relationships***

**Dr Bharat Desai**

**C**OUNSELLING is a relatively new branch of psychotherapeutic services. Traditionally, psychotherapy is used for treating mental disorders. Many times a mental disorder, before reaching the state of frank mental illness, manifests itself through symptoms of maladjustment. Counselling is an effective means of dealing with these problems of adjustment.

Problems of adjustment can occur at five different levels: physical, emotional, social, family, and personal. Various psychosocial issues can cause prolonged stress and anxiety, disturb mental balance, and result in difficulties at any of these levels. For example: growth in population produces overcrowded cities, increasing poverty as well as crime; political interests perpetuate ethnic fragmentation of society; personal ambitions and desire for fame hamper harmonious family relationships; and so on. Of late, these problems have been increasing and traditional family values have come under attack.

Indian culture is something astonishing for people around the world. It is one of the oldest, strongest, and more flexible cultures—it has survived fierce aggressions, one after the other, over the millennia. One of the pillars of this culture is its family system. Probably because it was agrarian by nature, every family could keep its flock together for a long time. But with the advancement of the industrial era, thousands of new job opportunities opened up, demanding specialized training. Consequently, the system of families having a single common activity for their sustenance has slowly broken down. Youngsters seeking specialized training and then suitable jobs have often to live far from home. In addition to this, the rapid

growth in girls' education has increased the competition for jobs and destabilized the age-old family system.

Industrialization, however, is not the only cause of this change. Even more significant is the excessive emphasis on individual freedom. In Europe, before the Renaissance, the influence of the Catholic Church was very strong, and living, suffering and dying for the Church or the king was considered to be a high ideal. A similar way of thinking prevailed in India as well. The family as a whole was considered to be more important than its individual members. Above the family was the community, still above was the village, and the kingdom—or in more recent times, the nation—was at the top. With the rise of Protestant thought, Europe underwent a slow change in its value system. 'Individual freedom' and 'earning money for its own sake' were the two new values which helped the growth of science, technology, and industry.

Nobody will deny that scientific and technological development is helping reduce many of the problems of humankind. It has also brought people much closer to each other—to such an extent that the term 'global village' is now a cliché. On the other hand, technological and industrial growth has given rise to the problem of alienation, as existential philosophers have rightly pointed out. The human being has become materialistic and has sensual pleasure as the goal of life; our efforts to make our children more self-reliant and independent have made them self-centred and alienated from other family members. Relationships involving affection have dwindled so much that people feel isolated even from their own selves. This situation certainly produces many serious psychological

problems. Should we say then that the old was all gold, that large joint families, with men as bread earners and women managing the kitchen, was an ideal system? Surely not. Educating women and promoting their emancipation is a positive change. It is necessary, however, to consider how we could properly manage the details of this development. Let us take a look at three illustrative cases.

### Case 1: In-laws' Relationship

Sharad is a two-year-old boy. His father is a young government officer and his mother a primary school teacher. Sharad's grandparents are like any other loving seniors of a family who consider it their duty to look after the kid when his mother is away. Some time after Sharad's birth, his mother started complaining about the way her parents-in-law looked after the child. Being a primary school teacher, she had learned some child psychology during her training period. Hence, she felt that her in-laws were overprotecting and pampering the child, making him excessively attached to and dependent on them. There were many hot exchanges among the mother and the grandparents; the father tried to smooth the situation without much success. Finally, against the desire of all other members of the family, the mother decided to put Sharad in a crèche. Will this decision solve the mother's problem? After Sharad was put in the crèche, he fell in the habit of thumb-sucking, became restless, and developed an eating problem too.

It is not my intention to make a case either against crèches or working mothers. But, why is the mother scared of Sharad's getting over-attached to her in-laws? Why could not all the family members come to an agreement with regard to the upbringing of the boy? Why did the mother decide to live separately from her in-laws with her husband and son? These are some of the questions which need to be discussed while counselling this family.

### Case 2: Parent-Teenager Relationship

Swati is a hot tempered girl studying in class nine. She is talented and possesses leadership qualities,

but she has the tendency to pick quarrels with people around her, particularly with elders. Her father is a very busy lawyer, and her mother a professional singer. Her elder sister is far from home pursuing higher studies. Swati has been sexually harassed by some boys from her own school. She complained about this to the headmistress, who advised her parents to be more watchful. Swati's mother scolded her for staying out of the house after evening. Swati scornfully replied, 'With whom should I speak at home? You are always busy with your programmes and Papa with his clients!'

If we analyse the cases of Sharad and Swati together, we find that the root of all the problems is the same in both cases: limited contact between the parents and the child.

Consider the nine-dot problem (image A). The task is to connect all the nine dots with just four straight lines, beginning from any corner.

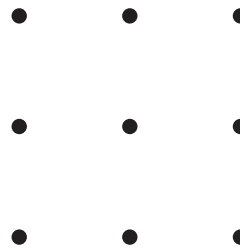


Image A

It is necessary to come out of the imaginary boundaries of the dotted square to get the solution. As long as one keeps on trying inside the imaginary dotted square, there will be no solution (image B).

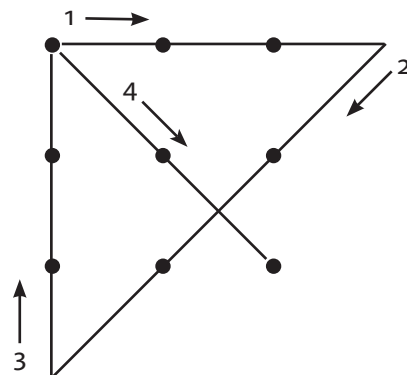
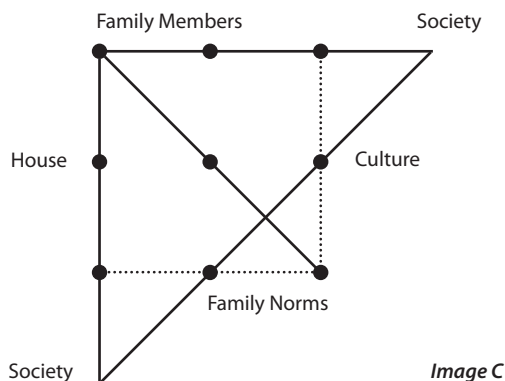


Image B

Using the nine-dot problem as a simile, the message to both the families is given this way (image C): The imaginary square can be said to have four dimensions, namely, (i) the members of the family with their traditions and life experiences, (ii) the structure of the house with its restrictions on interactions, (iii) the norms and ethical code of the family, and (iv) the local culture with its imperceptible influence on the family affairs.



Appropriate solutions to the problems of relationship inside the family are indeed possible, provided each of its members could reach out to society and see the problems from a different perspective. Reaching out to society means observing the reality outside the family 'square', keeping in touch with current social issues and trends, participating in some good community activity, and so forth. These activities generally open one's eyes and help to put family matters in proper perspective.

If Sharad's parents had done this exercise, they would have realized that a crèche is a good solution for those children who have nobody at home to look after them. The grandparents too need to give a second thought to their way of upbringing a kid. The generation gap is also an issue in this situation. If everybody keeps on trying to prove that he or she is correct, there will be tension always. In this case, the job of the counsellor is to help both sides maintain the cohesiveness of the family and give priority to the needs of the child.

In the case of Swati's family, the father and the mother are living their independent professional

lives. There is nothing wrong in this, but Swati is doing the same thing, which probably is not good at her age. During counselling it became evident that Swati's sexual harassment was not only a matter of misconduct on the part of the school boys; her own attention-seeking behaviour and grooming was equally responsible for it. This might have been a reaction to the lack of love and attention at home.

### Case 3: Wife-Husband Relationship

In the traditional joint family system, young couples did not get enough privacy and freedom. With the present system of nuclear families, probably they are getting too much of it, which again is creating problems of a different kind. Girija and Atul considered themselves to be a happily married couple. He worked as a software engineer and she served at a call centre. As Atul's parents were staying far from his workplace, the young couple initially rented a two-room house. After some time, Atul managed to get ownership of a three-room flat. It was a sort of heaven brought down on earth for the couple. A few months later, however, they started to have frequent hot exchanges for petty reasons. Girija had to work the night shift at times. This was disturbing her digestion and also her emotional balance. Atul found her irritable and restless even during intimate times. Without understanding the reason, he started accusing her of losing interest in him. Atul's parents came to know about these conflicts and decided to spend a fortnight with the young couple in order to pacify the situation. Girija took it as an encroachment on her freedom and felt her in-laws were holding her responsible for the problem. Moreover, the smallest reaction on her part would exasperate the mother-in-law who, in spite of being a well-educated person, felt that the cause of the problem was Girija's expecting too much from Atul. Girija's mother-in-law appeared to think, 'If she can't look after her husband, she'd better change her job.' Girija was firmly against this. Atul also felt that her income was necessary to help repay the house loan; so he too was against her changing the job in



which she was well settled. Still, he could not tolerate her behaviour.

The situation could easily have turned serious, ending in divorce. Fortunately for Girija, she was advised by a friend to consult a marriage counsellor, which she did. After talking separately with Atul and Girija, the counsellor found that the problem had three sources:

**Psychological** • (i) Girija's strong self-esteem and need for autonomy guided her to perceive the presence of her in-laws and the demands of her husband as threats to her core personality and her need for personal space. (ii) Atul had his male ego preventing him from empathizing with his wife and also from treating her as an equal partner. With respect to his parents he most likely developed a role-conflict. He could not decide how to react in case of a clash between them and his wife (son v. husband conflict). (iii) Atul's mother came to stay with her son with the purpose of checking the conflict between him and Girija. But she could not rise above her traditional role of mother-in-law.

**Biological** • Girija had a weak digestive system right from her childhood. Even during exams she could not reduce her sleep time which, her mother said, was more than eight hours. Thus, if she was not able to respond to her husband's demands, it was not due to a decrease in her affection for him. This is a common happening with many couples.

**Sociological** • The shift in the present-day female role based on education, the changing concepts of what 'good life' means, the increasing significance of secondary affiliations—to clubs, hobby groups, and the like—are some sociological factors that had an indirect influence on the couple's problems.

Taking all the above details into consideration, the counsellor decided to focus his attention on the following two issues: (i) How did the husband and wife perceive the 'family' as a system? Did they marry to establish a new family or an extension of their parents' families? (ii) What are the foundations on which a family is to be built? Mutual faith? Love? Self-confidence? Strong monetary

base? Readiness for sacrifice? Mutual acceptance? Or something else?

The counsellor discussed these issues with the couple in a non-threatening and non-judgmental way. Every couple knows that marital life involves adjustments from both sides; the problem is that generally each individual defines these adjustments from his or her own point of view. Everybody has needs and motives, and seeking one's own satisfaction is quite natural. But it requires purposeful efforts to understand what the other person needs and why. Trying to develop empathy for the feelings of the partner is a good beginning towards a better affective relationship. Having a child is certainly an additional strong unifying force, but it may not always be sufficient. A child may keep the parents under the same roof, but they may continue to be miles apart psychologically.

In this particular case, Atul was requested to understand why his wife was behaving the way she was. Atul did understand, but had never seriously sought a solution. It was explained to him that changing Girija's night-shift job was a must, but that this should not be done in a blunt or rude manner. To the pleasant surprise of the counsellor, Atul himself suggested a week-long outing with his wife, to create an atmosphere of tension-free and loving mutual confidence in which to discuss their problems calmly. Atul also said that Girija's need for proper sleep and job stability on the one side, and his own need for spontaneous intimate relationship with and monetary support from her on the other, should be adequately balanced. He worked out his plan, and it was successful! Once both of them accepted the situation mentally, securing a new job was not a serious problem.

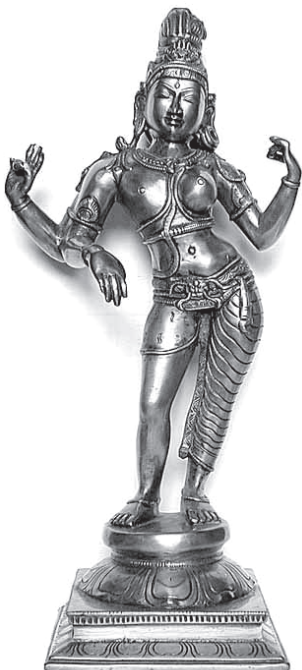
### ***Key to Family Relationships***

More cases of marital discord and unstable family relationships, with a variety of specific details, could be provided. But if we try to fathom the innermost depths of the whole issue, we realize that at the root lies the different conceptions that each person has about the relation between a man and a

woman. There are three major viewpoints regarding this relationship: (i) male superiority, (ii) equality, and (iii) complementarity. For many centuries, people all over the world have subscribed to the 'male superiority' viewpoint. Indian mythology too is replete with stories of male gods who either make a display of great valour or help to restore the welfare of their disciples. The Vedic concept of *ardha-nari-nateshwara*—half male, half female deity—symbolizes the equality and unity of the masculine and the feminine. But it has rarely, if ever, found manifestation in the actual life of couples.

As the concept of democratic living and governance has evolved, and particularly as an effect of the women's liberation movement in Western countries, a slow change has taken place in the relative freedom of women in relation to men. Today, the 'equality' model is strongly advocated all over the world. Every year more and more nations and states, or provinces within the nations, are working out policies, and successfully implementing them, to favour women's empowerment. Research on gender differences has also supported this view. Except two characteristics—physical strength and aggressiveness—that men have significantly more of, there are almost no qualitative differences between women

#### *Ardha-nari-nateshwara*



and men. Proponents of this equality model also feel that constantly exercising it at all levels—educational, social, and governmental—will bring the required change in the mindset of both men and women. As a consequence, it will improve the quality of family life. Wives and husbands, mothers and fathers, girls and boys, will enjoy equal status and mutual respect; the members of the family will remain more trustfully and affectionately related to each other.

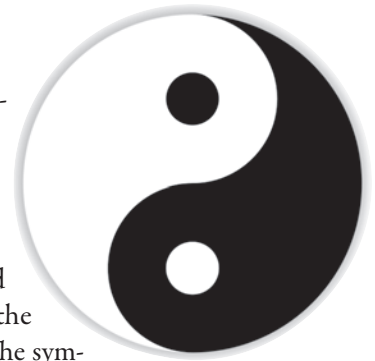
The third viewpoint of

'complementarity' believes that, since there are strengths and weaknesses in both genders, the weaknesses of one can be compensated with the strengths of the other, and vice versa. The symbol of *ardha-nari-nateshwara* can also be interpreted as one of male-female complementarity. Taoism, another Eastern philosophy, also suggests the same. The principles of Yin and Yang (Female and Male), although separate, are also present within each other.

This principle of complementarity seems to be present in all animal species. Rejecting it may create more confusion about one's proper role and behaviour. It can also be argued that differences make men and women more dependent on each other—one is incomplete without the other. For this reason, couples that understand their complementarity make happier families.

Offering critical comments based on research findings is beyond the scope of this article. Still, I honestly feel that counselling based on the principle of complementarity alone can help strengthen family relationships. Instead of making futile efforts to force equality between genders—which may go against instinctual drives—appealing on the basis of complementarity would be better and more naturally accepted.

The current scenario of the family system is certainly not good. There are millions of people trying to contain the shakes and breaks in their families. Indian culture, however, is strong enough to face this temporary turmoil. Spiritual leaders and saints of diverse faiths are doing wonderful work in this field. Counsellors, who work mainly at the individual level, can also contribute significantly. After all, every person on this earth has at the core of her or his heart a longing to grow and thrive in a warm and assuring family. And this longing exists by the will of Providence. Hence it is bound to bear its cherished fruits.



*Yin-Yang*

# Challenges of Parenting

Astha Parmar

**T**wo decades ago, raising a child was not half as difficult as it is today. In joint families, the elders had experience and traditional wisdom. This guided the young parents. Life was simple, and goals and desires were modest. School studies were not that much of a strain, and college admissions were not so hard to procure. Most important, life revolved round the family, with daily routines and priorities being determined by the needs of the children and the elderly. This created an atmosphere where parents received adequate support and guidance to raise children, and children had several role models and mentors to aid them through their rough patches.

Today, life revolves around work, creating a contorted lifestyle, with its incessant emphasis on money-making and enjoyment. Priorities and routine, instead of being determined by the needs of the family, are mandated by corporate hours and rules of the rat race. Parents face a gamut of demands and emotions—lack of social support, time constraints, lack of wisdom and guidance, and the sheer sense of responsibility of raising their children ‘right’. Besides, there are important social changes that are significantly impacting children: increased academic workload, added pressure of tuition and coaching, and bombardment by media—especially television and the Internet.

The world today does open up a range of options for children. But without the vision of a well integrated personality and adequate parental knowledge of guidelines which can help achieve this goal, these choices can quickly turn into pitfalls.

## ***The Counsellors’ Approach***

In response to social statistics that reflect this emerging crisis in child development—with ris-

ing rates of depression, suicide, and delinquency among children—educational institutions have been turning to psychologists and counsellors for help. However, there is precious little that a single counsellor can do to handle the concerns and anxieties of an entire school. Given the number of students and the limited time available with each counsellor, it is physically impossible to deal with all cases that have turned critical and unmanageable. In such situations, the predominant approach becomes reactive and problem-oriented. A systematic approach, which will prevent the problem from arising in the first place, becomes impossible to adopt. It is like fire-fighting: we douse the flame, but cannot prevent the recurrence of fire.

Most researches and field applications on parenting have been undertaken within a Western framework and perspective. The training of counsellors and psychologists in India too is based on Western approaches and methodologies. The West must be credited with having done considerable research in this field. These researches are based on meticulous and painstaking collection of data, rigorous analysis, and strict logical deductions. Much of this research, however, has involved young white students in American schools and colleges, and therefore inferences drawn from these studies cannot be generalized to children living in a completely different culture. No matter how original the research, how thorough the collection of data, and how perfect the logic, the conclusions are going to be governed by the assumptions one makes. Further, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. Even today, with all the advancement and spread of knowledge, some Western societies are amongst the sickest in the



world. The rates of divorce, alcoholism, suicide, and drug addiction are highest in some Western countries—Japan having joined them only recently. Obviously, there is something wrong in the basic understanding of what actually constitutes a human being.

### ***An Integrated Approach***

The Eastern approach does not contradict the Western understanding on this subject; it complements the latter. That human beings share some basic traits—hunger, fear, sleep, and procreation—with animals is self-evident. But the human being has something more to his personality as suggested by Swami Vivekananda: In this human frame, there is an animal, a man, and a God. ‘Man’ is defined by such qualities as forbearance, forgiveness, truth, non-anger, knowledge, intelligence to discriminate between right and wrong, sense of cleanliness and hygiene, non-stealing, control of the senses, and control of mind. When the above-mentioned traits are perfected, the human being attains to godliness in this very life. ‘God’, in the Vedantic tradition, does not imply a ‘supernatural being’ who creates the world and governs it from the outside. Divinity is inherent in human nature and only awaits manifestation. A spiritually-oriented system of education aims at manifesting this perfection in human life. Incidentally, trying to manifest these qualities also brings out the best in the human being. In an attempt to cultivate these virtues, one attains human excellence.

At this point one is apt to ask how a country with hundreds of millions living below the poverty line, the highest female foeticide rates, widespread caste discrimination, and persistent dowry deaths can claim to possess a philosophy that can guide healthy human development. It is probably unfair to compare India’s young democracy with nations that have enjoyed sovereignty for several centuries. Instead, Indians living abroad could provide a better benchmark. They are amongst the most coveted professionals in the international job market and have also made their mark as entrepre-

neurs. The reason for this is that Indians tend to have stable homes. Stable homes help executives have a relatively stable frame of mind, thus making them more effective and efficient. This stability and maturity in the Indian household comes from continued respect for certain traditional values and practices. These have survived all the modernization, westernization, and globalization that has swept the world. This reality should prompt us to look seriously into the traditional cultural insights on parenting and child-upbringing. With the joint family system having collapsed, this storehouse of traditional knowledge is all but lost. Can we retrieve this knowledge? Can we systematize it and make it available to parents?

Traditional knowledge cannot, however, be considered a panacea for all the ills afflicting families today. In fact, the contemporary social context demands fresh psychological insights and a more individualized approach to children’s problems. Indus Quality Foundation, a non-profit organization involved in improving the quality of education in Indian schools with which I am associated, has been attempting to integrate traditional cultural values with contemporary psychological knowledge by developing a course on ‘responsible parenting’. The five modules comprising the course cover the following topics: (i) What is parenting? (ii) Methodologies to deal with children’s problems. (iii) Parent-related stress management. (iv) Responsible parenting according to sacred texts. (v) Imparting life-skills to children.

### ***A Case Study***

The following is a first-hand account of one parent who benefited from the aforementioned course:

I separated from my husband when my son, Anil [not his real name], was only two years old. Anil has since been growing up under my custody and guardianship. Both of us live with my parents, who lay great emphasis on morals and good values. I have a part-time job which I can do at my home. I try my level best to give sufficient time and attention to Anil. Consequently, I am really hard-

pressed for time. My parents are getting old, and they have difficulty coping with Anil's boisterous manners, messy habits, and laziness.

Things were fine for some time after my separation from my husband. I had not yet started working, and Anil was adequately cared for and felt loved and wanted. At school he participated in plays, painting competitions, numerical activities, and fancy dress competitions, and almost invariably won prizes. Even in studies, he was amongst the top five students in his class. He had friends not only from his own class but from senior classes as well. He was a well-behaved child, with varied interests and likeable qualities.

But as Anil turned seven, things started changing. Complaints started trickling in from school: Anil had bitten a kid who grabbed his tiffin; he was fighting with other kids; he was having problems getting along with his classmates. Then, by the time he was eight, his studies started getting affected. He was not completing his work in class. In fact, he would barely write a line or two in a whole period. He had lost all interest in studies. To make things worse, he was becoming more and more obstinate. Even at home he was misbehaving with his elders, breaking and spoiling things, fighting with the servants, and becoming impossible to manage. Something had gone seriously wrong.

In the middle of this crisis I got in touch with the Indus Quality Foundation. Through their help I could get personal counselling, and attended a five-module course in 'responsible parenting'. In the counselling process, problems were clearly delineated and causes identified.

**The Causal Factors** • Anil's problems could be traced to the following causes:

- There was marked pressure of studies, both at school and at home.
- His needs were changing with increasing age.
- He was always playing pranks and was being persistently scolded by elders; this led to unhappiness. He needed encouragement.
- He was not finding appropriate means to chan-

nel his energies.

- Being the only child in the house, he was lacking peer company.
- Having only grown-ups around made his life very boring. He needed more joy in life.
- He had people to instruct him, but none to share his problems. This was leading to frustration. He needed a mentor.
- There were not enough challenges in his life to teach him responsible behaviour.

Once the causes for Anil's problems were identified, it was not difficult to figure out the solutions. But putting the solutions into actual practice called for changes at home. It is important to emphasize that, in this particular case, being a single parent, I was the fulcrum of Anil's life. It made a lot of difference even if I made solitary efforts without informing other members of the family. The results I got show that even if one member of a family tries seriously, he or she can have a positive impact on a child's life.

**Measures Implemented** • Anil was losing interest in studies due to too much pressure. As a result, he was neither able to do his class-work, nor complete his homework. In order to reduce the pressure, two steps were taken: (i) His study time was reduced; and (ii) the approach to his studies was changed.

A schedule was drawn up and the following times were allotted for his studies:

- Thirty minutes in the morning, before going to school. This time was for reciting what he had learnt the previous day.
- One hour in the afternoon, after he had had his lunch and had rested. This was for homework and learning or finishing tasks that were, as yet, incomplete.
- Thirty minutes in the evening, after he had finished playing. This was solely devoted to revision and learning.

Anil was now getting two hours of study time spread over the whole day. As a result, whenever he started his studies, he was fresh and alert. Even if he did not study in the allotted time, he was not

scolded. He was also not given any extra time to finish his work. In case a topic was left undone, he failed in the test. This made him realize the consequences of not studying within the allotted time.

Anil was now in class four and was expected to be able to frame and answer questions on his own. In order to complete a chapter, he had to first learn spelling, then revise the questions and answers done in class, read the chapter again, and finally frame extra questions and memorize them. This was painful! In order to ease Anil's workload, emphasis was laid on reading the chapter thoroughly and learning the spelling. Having done this, he did not find it difficult to answer the extra questions that were asked in the examinations.

**Solution to Behavioural Problems** • The rest of Anil's problems were related to his behaviour. He had lots of energy but no means for canalizing it. This was the main reason behind the anomalies in his behaviour. As a result, he was always up to one mischief or the other. He would find interesting things to do, even if it meant breaking something. Naturally, he was always getting into trouble.

An overdose of negative reactions from grown-ups and servants was causing Anil frustration. In the absence of a local peer group, there was none that he could freely associate with. This problem was overcome by helping him join a cricket group. This not only provided him opportunity for healthy physical activity, it also gave him a chance to associate with children of his age. He would now spend more than two hours at play, and this gave him a good break from the home environment. Moreover, he learnt to do his studies faster, because he did not want to be late for his cricket session. As cricket is a team sport, Anil also learnt to work in a group. His behaviour started improving, both at home and at school.

**Getting a Mentor** • It was also felt that Anil needed someone who would understand his problems, work out solutions, and guide him gently into more acceptable forms of behaviour. Such a mentor was found in my own sister. Anil trusted

her and was also very fond of her. So, even though she was not staying with the family, he started communicating with her over the phone and the Internet. She, in turn, started to gently guide him about ways to handle difficult situations. Now he had a friend who was giving him tips about proper behaviour without moralizing, and who was also counselling his mother on the problems he was facing.

**The Results** • There was a remarkable change in Anil within a few months:

- His aggregate examination marks rose to over eighty per cent. His rank improved and he was soon among the first fifteen students in class in terms of examination marks as against the twenty-seventh rank he held earlier.
- He was now doing his homework much faster.
- The destructive behaviour at home stopped.
- His behaviour in class improved.
- The number of his close friends was growing again.
- He started being more respectful towards elders and servants at home. As a result he too received more love and affection from them.
- He started showing interest in extra-curricular activities.
- He was appointed junior prefect at school.

## **Conclusion**

Given the complexity of the problem—the unbearable pressure of school syllabus and increased competition at school, the severe time crunch, the nuclear nature of families with their own stresses and strains, the absence of grandparents at home, and the lack of traditional know-how—it is imperative that some kind of guidance, counselling, and training programme be available to parents having problems with their child's behaviour. The above case study suggests that counselling and training modules that take advantage of traditional family values and family ties, while following scientific methods, can be effective in helping parents overcome stresses and guide their children judiciously.

# ***Counselling: When Do Children Need Our Help?***

**Dr Pushpa Bose**

**Y**OUNG children are very dependent on their environment—parents, family, home, and school. They get affected by changes in their immediate environment, either positive or negative, much more than adults.

Singapore, like many other countries of the world, has been witnessing rapid social change in the last few decades. Growing industrialization and urbanization, which has led to increasing but unbalanced affluence in society, has put great pressure on the population, particularly children and young adults. To function at an optimum level, young people nowadays are required to make considerable adjustments. The increased pace of life has, however, not been matched by a better or more comprehensive support system. In particular, the extended family system and the close relationship between members of the local community—which were in many cases the hallmarks of rural life—have almost disappeared.

In the nuclear families of these days, generally speaking, both parents have to work to meet the financial needs of the household. Today's children are also facing a world in which competition goes hand in hand with the call to perform and learn various co-curricular skills—arts, music, dance, drama, declamation, and competitive sports as well. These demands invariably lead to significant stress; and the situation is compounded, in many instances, by high-strung parents and teachers.

## ***WINGS Counselling Centre***

In 1995, the then president of the Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore, Swami Jayadevananda, on reading about the youth and juvenile delinquency in the country, realized the impact that childhood

experiences have on the social development and general well-being of the adult population. He was convinced that guidance and support to children and youth with emotional, social, and psychological problems would enhance their ability to mature into well-adjusted adults.

To meet this need he helped establish the Ramakrishna Mission Counselling Centre (RMCC) in July 1995, which was later renamed WINGS Counselling Centre—a more neutral and secular name, considering that children in Singapore come from various religious and social backgrounds.

The counselling centre was, from its inception, fully funded by the National Council of Social Service for its expenditures on personnel, training, and other operational activities. The centre, designated a Voluntary Welfare Organization, is the pioneer of school-based counselling in Singapore and is staffed by professionally trained counsellors.

## ***Types of Disturbed Behaviour***

Disturbed behaviour may be the first indication that a child is struggling with stress. Often, children do not complain directly, or even if they do, they communicate the cause of their distress in a language difficult to understand. Their abnormal behaviour and emotions are a means to communicate their difficulties, conflicts, and stresses. It is important for parents to learn to recognize and identify their problems at an early stage in order to take appropriate preventive and remedial measures.

Children may exhibit diverse symptoms of stress:

**Physical Symptoms** • Frequent headaches and tummy aches, pain in the chest, frequent urination, poor appetite or overeating—all these without any



## WINGS Counselling Centre

**We focus on the individuals' ability** to believe in their **Worth**, trust their **Insight**, invest time and effort in **Nurturing** themselves, fulfil their **Growth** potential, realize that they have within themselves the **Strength** to overcome difficulties, break free from their problems, and soar to live life anew.

The **WINGS** Counselling Centre serves a multi-racial and multi-religious community of children in Singapore and offers school-based counselling services. Our counsellors work with the teachers at school and make home visits to meet parents, assessing, advising, and intervening in a comprehensive manner. The centre also conducts numerous outreach programmes aimed at preventing problems and enriching the lives of children and their parents. Some of the outreach programmes, which the centre has run with considerable success, include talks, workshops, and group sessions for parents, teachers, and children, usually focusing on the following areas:

- Stress management for children, parents, and teachers.
- Basic guidelines on parenting.
- Communicating with children and inculcating discipline.
- Understanding teens and setting their limits.
- Managing sibling rivalry.
- Grief management.
- Dealing with emotions, self-esteem, and responsibility.
- Helping kids understand their parents.
- Study skills and mind mapping.
- Bully-proofing children.
- Smoking and drugs.

underlying physical cause.

**Emotional Problems** • Fearfulness, nervousness, poor attention and concentration, anxiety and agitation, irritability, temper tantrums, refusal to go to school, and depression.

**Behavioural Abnormalities** • Persistent disobedience, stealing, lying, playing truant, being quar-

relsome, running away from home—a very serious symptom—and taking drugs.

When children with such behaviour do not respond to normal disciplinary methods, it is a possible sign that they are under severe stress. Parents and teachers can help prevent the development of such problems.

## Parental Awareness

Parents have to be aware of and sensitive to their children's needs, personality, abilities, difficulties, and current life situations. For example, when a mother is hospitalized, her child may hold him- or herself responsible for causing her illness. This is not an abnormal reaction. But the child may not be able to cope with the school homework temporarily. Some of the aforementioned symptoms may also appear, indicating that there is a need to lessen or temporarily remove the pressure created on the child. Letting the school and other members of the family know about this will elicit a sympathetic response from teachers and relatives, helping restore the child's concentration and normal performance in a short time.

When children are found to suffer high levels of anxiety and stress the following must be considered:

- Give them more time for play and relaxation. It is useful to teach children some simple relaxation techniques—like breathing slowly and deeply when they feel tense and nervous.
- Allow children to express their feelings, fears, and angers freely.
- Prepare children for any anticipated change in their immediate environment, like shifting of home, the birth of a sibling, mother's hospitalization, absence of parents for certain periods, and so forth.
- Often adults think that children are too young to understand complicated situations. On the contrary, simple explanations of conflictive situations should be given to them; doing so can markedly reduce children's worries.
- Parental quarrels make children fearful and anx-

ious. Ideally, quarrels should be sorted out in private, but if children happen to witness them it is important to explain to them that they are not the cause of the conflict.

- Children should be encouraged to interact with other people—relatives, neighbours, friends, and teachers.

Having good social skills is one of the most important protective qualities children can develop. Some parents are themselves so isolated that they do not encourage their children to mix freely with friends and neighbours. Children who come to our counselling centre tend to have fewer friends, but those who have good close friends do overcome their problems with a little help.

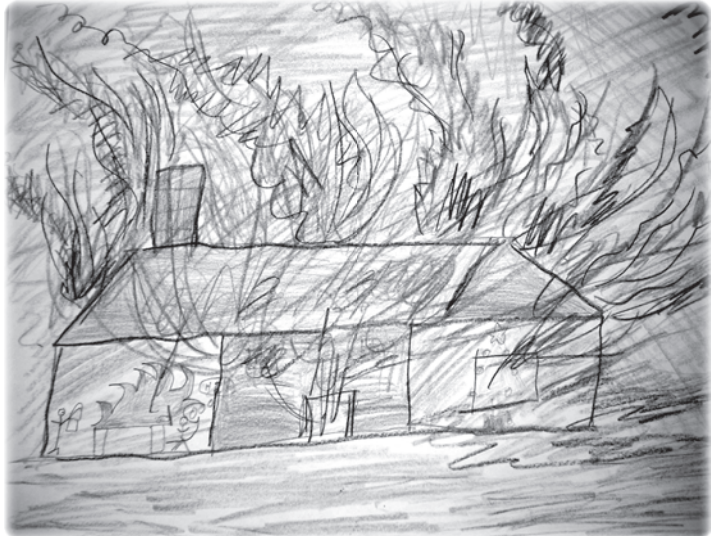
People in general are more resistant to accepting professional help for psychological, behavioural, and mental issues than to getting medical help for physical ailments. But it is indeed healthy to know when and what kind of help is required by a kid, and to seek it rather than deny a problem.

Three case studies will illustrate the concepts presented above.

### ***Salim and the House on Fire***

Salim was a twelve-year-old boy. His behaviour was normal. He was a good student, obedient—both at home and in school—and conscientious, who kept to himself without causing any trouble in the classroom. He was referred to us by his school because he started missing school frequently since the beginning of the new year. This eventually led him to be completely absent from school for over two weeks. Salim's parents were unable to understand why their son's behaviour had changed; nor were they able to persuade him to return to school.

Salim was the youngest of five children in a nuclear family. His father was an odd-job labourer and his mother a homemaker. The family lived in a two-room flat and had financial difficulties. Salim was very close to his mother, but he had little relation with his elder brothers. Overall he was a pleasant boy, though rather reticent, who gave monosyllabic



*A house on fire*

answers to our questions.

On IQ testing, Salim was found to be above average. During a session at the counselling centre, he was invited to play or to draw, according to his wish. He chose to draw, and this helped the counsellor understand his problems at school. Salim drew a house on fire. He was very meticulous and took his time to depict the details. A very striking picture—bright red colours with the figure of a boy trying to put out the fire.

Psychologically interpreted, a house drawn by a child is often symbolic of the child's mother. This picture provided a clue, as it suggested that Salim could be worried for his mother's safety, albeit unconsciously.

On further enquiry, his mother told us that lately she had started growing tired of the constant struggle to make ends meet, and had little hope of improving their financial situation. She had begun to express depressive thoughts like 'life is not worth living' in Salim's presence, although she denied having contemplated committing suicide.

Joint sessions with Salim and his parents helped to reassure the boy that his mother was not going to do anything harmful to herself, and that she was looking forward to seeing him succeed in his studies and building a better life for himself. Salim went back to school and, with the support of his teachers, was able to obtain financial assistance to continue his education.

School refusal in children is a serious condition. If left without any intervention they may

### Common Stresses Affecting Children Today

- Illness in siblings or parents.
- The birth of a sibling.
- Moving house.
- Starting school.
- Changing classes and teachers.
- The loss of a friend.
- Failing in examinations.
- The loss of a pet.
- Parents' marital conflicts, temporary separation, or divorce.

suffer 'educational suicide', however intelligent and capable they might be. Typically, the child refuses to go to school feigning some physical ailment—tummy-ache, headache, and the like. These 'ailments' manifest themselves especially on Mondays or after school holidays, but not on weekends or during school holidays. The symptoms usually subside once the time for going to school is past. In cases where the child is intelligent and has no educational difficulties, there is usually a problem at school, or there may be anxiety about leaving home, as was the case with Salim.

Truancy is also a condition where a child is absent from school, but parents are generally unaware of this fact. The child leaves home in the morning as if for school, but spends time with friends and returns home in the afternoon, giving the impression that he or she has been at school the whole day. Children who play truant generally do not like school, are poor students, and display other anti-social behaviours like persistent disobedience, quarrelsomeness, stealing, lying, and mixing with other school drop-outs.

### Gopal and the Dead Fish

Gopal was seven years old and was also referred to us by his school. Previously he was a fairly active and cheerful boy who did well in his studies. But for the past two or three months he had become

inattentive in class, and his exam results were quite poor. By nature Gopal was quiet, cooperative, and intelligent, though pretty listless. There was no history of any illness, divorce, or deaths in the family. His parents had also noticed that Gopal had become withdrawn and cried easily. He was obviously depressed, but the cause of his depression was unclear. Although failure to pass his exams could have been one of the causes for his depression, it was not a complete explanation of the situation, since the change in Gopal's behaviour occurred before his examination results were declared.

Gopal was brought to our counselling centre by his father. After a few sessions, he started talking about his life at home. He was an only child. Both his parents worked away from home. He was not allowed to play with children in his neighbourhood and naturally felt lonely. When questioned about his loneliness, he said he felt more lonely of late as his pet—a 'goldfish' in a bowl—had died. He had felt happy when his father bought it. He used to talk to the fish and felt very sad when it died. He had not revealed this to anyone.

We advised the parents to support and encourage Gopal to make friends and allow him to play with children in the neighbourhood, though under supervision. At school, we discussed the matter with the teachers and requested them to assign a buddy to Gopal, so that he could learn to socialize. Our experience shows that children should be encouraged to make close friends. It is a step towards positive mental health.

In this context, depression refers to a sustained low mood, though it is not all that common in young children, whose emotions are generally labile. It is easier to change gloomy moods in children by distracting them. Not so with teenagers whose moods are usually more sustained. Teenagers are therefore more prone to develop depression.

### It Is Not Easy to Help


Eight-year-old Sam was brought to us by his mother because he was being disobedient, was telling lies, and was showing no interest in his studies. He ha-

bitually teased and tormented his four-year-old younger brother as well. Sam was the second of three siblings. His elder sister, aged thirteen, was well behaved and a good student. His father had a transport business and would himself drive a bus at times. On such occasions he would allow Sam to miss school and accompany him on his travels. His mother was very worried about Sam's future as she was getting complaints from school regarding his anti-social behaviour.

Sam's was a case of conduct disorder. Lack of consistent discipline was aggravated by his father's indulgent attitude, which undermined his mother's attempts at disciplining him. Both parents were interviewed in a joint session with the purpose of inducing the father to collaborate with his wife in dealing with Sam. His school teachers were also

advised to be firm and demand strict discipline from the child. Initially Sam's father cooperated, and things improved. But as the father himself was not very disciplined, Sam continued with his disruptive behaviour and his poor performance at school.

This was unfortunate, as experience has shown that if this type of conduct disorder is left unchecked, the child is likely to become a school drop-out and get involved in delinquency. Firm and consistent discipline, meted out jointly by both parents, is effective in helping the child adjust to the norms of the society, thus preventing the future use of force or legal measures against him.

Parenting is probably one of the greatest challenges, but also one of the most satisfying and rewarding experiences of life. 

## Basic Principles of Parenting

**I**n light of the above case studies, we can now sum up some of the fundamental principles of healthy parenting:

- The most important role of parents is to care for and provide unconditional love to the child, especially when the child is behaving in an unlovable manner. Love and care from both parents provides security and a sense of belonging to the growing child.
- Love needs to be communicated to the child in an affectionate way—with patting, hugs, and kisses.
- Discipline does not mean punishment, it means training with love. It is very important that both parents agree on the rules and restrictions put on their children as well as the concessions they offer, so that the children perceive their parents as a reliable unit. Parents must not convey confusing and mixed messages through their behaviour. If parents undermine each other, children become perplexed, or learn to be manipulative and do whatever they like.
- To be effective, discipline should be firm, consistent, and immediate—a mother need not wait for the father to come home to instil discipline.
- Children require clear and simple rules with suitable explanations about what is expected of them in

a given situation and what consequences are likely to follow. This provides the foundation for the child to be well-behaved, well-socialized, and better adjusted to the demands of society.

- Spend time playing with and talking to your children, and sincerely listen to them. Have meals with them and organize family outings and holidays. It helps children build up positive self-esteem and a sense of belonging. A family that spends time together stays together. Family unity facilitates the acquisition of such basic values as respect for others, honesty, and truthfulness. Nothing is more effective in achieving this than the parents' personal example. A close and fluent relationship within the family also makes children feel less intimidated to approach their parents and disclose their problems.
- Finally, one of the vital prerequisites for the healthy upbringing of children is personal adjustment and a harmonious marital relationship. When the marriage is happy, the home becomes a haven for children to grow and develop. There are two gifts that parents can give to their children: roots and wings—roots to grow, nurture, and develop a solid foundation, physically, emotionally, and spiritually; wings to soar high from those foundations and freely expand their horizons.



# ***Counselling for Young Children***

**Hema Gurnani**

**T**HAT counselling is meant for the mentally ill is an old notion. It is for this reason that people usually refrain from seeking the support of a counsellor, either for themselves or for their children, even when it is required. It has been widely believed that 'given time, psychological problems go away by themselves'!

Today, with a better awareness and understanding of human physiology and psychology, and advances in psychiatry, it has become evident that when children's psychological problems are left unaddressed they tend to have long-term negative consequences. Thus parents and caretakers should pay close attention to the psychological and developmental aspects of children and, when needed, seek professional support instead of taking a 'wait and see' approach.

Many would wonder: Why would a kindergarten child need counselling? One reason is early schooling. The skills possessed by children multiply dramatically between the ages of two and five, transforming them from physically helpless babies into thinking children. By the age of five, most children have good coordination for gross movements, reasonable communication and socializing skills, and the capacity to solve simple problems using their own intellectual abilities. Imposition of a 'structured learning experience' during this period of childhood carries the risk of placing too much pressure on the child. Why is it so? Because such schooling stunts creativity and makes learning a drudgery rather than a spontaneous process of self-discovery. The social codes of right and wrong behaviour and moral values are best learnt at home, where parents and other family members can provide tender loving care coupled with abundant fun and playtime, all of which are necessary for the de-

velopment of self-confidence and self-esteem.

Early learning in children should be self-directed and spontaneous. For example, children learn to communicate in their mother-tongue not because anyone teaches them in a formal way; rather, they pick up the basics of the language by observing and imitating what they see and hear in their environment. This shows that children have the capacity to learn a language, or anything they want to, through self-discovery. Nevertheless, some things like 'healthy fears'—not to touch fire, not to insert their fingers into electrical sockets, and the like—should be taught to children for their own safety. This can be done by giving simple and suitable explanations.

In contrast, early schooling introduces 'social comparisons' amongst children, which can prove psychologically damaging by affecting their self-esteem. Many times parents and teachers fail to understand that children of the same age group have different capabilities, for the simple reason that they have different life experiences and exposures to the world; and it is these experiences that determine the learning curve of each child. Consequently, it is not proper to expect all children in the same class to have similar abilities only because they are in the same class. We all need to understand that children do not learn through such narrow categories defined by adults as reading, writing, doing mathematics, or studying science. Between two and five years of age, learning has no sharp distinctions or boundaries; it should, therefore, be guided through amusing games and methodologies that can enhance creativity and spontaneity.

Stress among children in kindergartens and primary schools is mostly generated by parents or by the school system. This happens because many par-

ents expect pre-school children to be smart and intelligent, and to score straight 'A's like their peers. Too often, when a child fails to fulfil parental expectations, the parents tend to vent their own frustration and anger on the child. This attitude determines the present and future response of children and can emotionally damage their perception of the world.

Every child has a unique set of qualities and limitations, and the learning process of each varies accordingly. Some learn better through interactive play; for them parents can act as the first educators, and home can be the first school. At home, learning takes place without pressure. Similarly, there are children who need more stimulation; for them, pre-school experiences are the best incentives. Such precocious children require a suitable school capable of judiciously enhancing their innate traits.

Before enrolling children in early academic schooling, parents must reflect on their particular needs; their potentials, strengths, and limitations; how ready they are for schooling and temporary separation from home and parents; and their ability to adjust to the demands and expectations of structured learning.

If these issues are not carefully considered, children may become victims of the pre-school system. When children are enrolled in school before they are ready for it, they tend to have learning difficulties, though most of them will not be able to verbalize their difficulties. The situation is aggravated if their problems go unnoticed by schoolteachers and parents. For example, a child who is restless, fidgety, and disturbs others in class can get labelled as a 'very naughty child'. In reality, this naughty child may be suffering from 'Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder', commonly known as ADHD, which calls for a lot of support and guidance from parents and teachers, who should understand the child's particular needs.

### **Areas of Concern in Younger Children**

Parents and teachers need to be aware of 'Learning Disorders' (LD) in kindergarten and primary school children. Here are some suggestions for de-

## **What is Counselling?**

**Counselling is a relatively short-term**, interpersonal therapy provided by trained professionals in accordance with specific ethical and legal standards. It deals mainly with psychologically healthy people who need to resolve developmental and situational problems; people who are not 'sick' but 'stuck'. It focuses on prevention and education.

Currently, professional counselling involves undergoing studies based on behavioural, cognitive, and affective theories.

A practitioner must complete the required course of study—master's or doctoral—to be licensed by the relevant authority as a professional counselor. Currently, courses in professional counselling involve studies in behavioural, cognitive, and affective theories. It has specialized practices in different areas: school, marriage, family, mental health, rehabilitation, career, and the like.

tecting and dealing with them.

### **Warning signs that should alert parents to possible LD in their children:**

- Discrepancy between potential and actual performance—children with LD may seem smart and intelligent but still tend to score low marks.
- Hesitation when teachers or parents ask them to read aloud, though they may enjoy being read aloud to by others.
- Procrastination or avoidance of any kind of written work. This may be due to poor motor coordination. Such children may also misread letters—like 'p' for 'q', or vice versa.
- Poor organizational skills and unclear speaking or thinking.
- Tendency to be overactive.

### **Consequences of developmental delay in a child:**

- Poor self-esteem and lack of self-confidence.
- Lack of motivation in learning, or fear of going to school.

- May get labelled as lazy by teachers, parents, or adults.
- May become a victim of the education system. If the condition is not detected at an early stage and managed competently, the child neither learns much nor develops to his or her full potential.
- May become isolated, resulting in lack of good friends and relationships.

**Dyslexia:** Usually children with dyslexia are quite intelligent but tend to have problems only in the area of academic performance skills. We all know that academic skills are essential for school-children, which means they should be able to read, write, spell, and grasp mathematical concepts. The brain cells controlling these skills are deficient in children with dyslexia. Dyslexic children appear intelligent; they may understand well what is taught orally in class and be able to give correct oral answers to what the teachers and parents ask orally, but they have marked difficulty reading written texts correctly and writing down their replies.

**ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder):** This is a very special kind of learning disability. Children with this disorder are often la-

belled 'naughty'. They display unusual behaviours: avoiding any kind of work, refusing to follow the instructions given, appearing to annoy the instructor on purpose, and frequently disrupting lessons by doing in the class everything else besides listening to the teacher. Such children may avoid eye contact when scolded, which may be taken as disrespect towards the scolding adult.

### A Case Study

Mohan (not his real name) is an only child. As a baby he displayed very active behaviour and great curiosity. Mohan's parents interpreted his curiosity as a sign of intelligence, which needed a lot of stimulation. As he had no siblings to play with, Mohan was sent to a private play school at the age of two. Two years later, he was enrolled in a kindergarten that had three levels: Nursery, K1, and K2.

Nursery was fun for Mohan, as the activity there required very little goal-oriented work. Yet, according to his teachers, even in Nursery, Mohan displayed difficulties in sitting still and writing. By the time he was in K1, Mohan started manifesting such behavioural problems as walking around in class, pinching and hitting his friends, and disturbing the teachers. While being corrected for his behaviour by two teachers, he seemed attentive to their remarks and remorseful of his action, but the next minute he was back to his old self.

Naturally, Mohan was not liked by his classmates—some even labelled him a 'bully'. He felt lonely and isolated; he would walk around the class during lessons and displayed frustration, anger, and violence at times. Finally, the teachers had a meeting with his parents. They were surprised to hear that the parents had received similar complains from Mohan's play school. At that time the parents thought that the child would outgrow this behaviour. The teachers recommended that Mohan be taken to a psychologist, or a counsellor, or a psychiatrist. Mohan was assessed by a psychologist and was diagnosed as having ADHD.

In the case of Mohan, emphasis was given to developing his self-esteem by helping him deal with

## Managing Children with ADHD

**Dealing with a child with ADHD** can be tiring for parents and frustrating for teachers, be it at home or in school. But teaching some simple techniques to the child can be very helpful. The effects can be redoubled if parents and teachers know how to use these techniques accurately. Here are some general and practical measures that can be implemented at home:

- Encourage discipline.
- Reward good behaviour.
- Encourage children to do simple chores like tidying their toys, cleaning their room, and the like.
- Above all, be consistent in your instructions and try to model the behaviour you want your children to develop.

his difficulties, both at home and at school. Parents were told to have simple and consistent rules for Mohan to follow on a daily basis. They were encouraged to learn more about ADHD and how to deal with it. They were also advised to conscientiously follow the treatment plan recommended by Mohan's doctor, and administer the prescribed medications regularly. In brief, the task of the counsellor is to re-empower the parents, so that they can feel confident about managing this condition.

As part of the support system, Mohan's school and teachers were involved. For Mohan—or any other child with ADHD—to achieve a healthy self-esteem and successful performance at school is crucial. To make this possible, the teachers were requested to make a few simple classroom adjustments, in a way that Mohan's strengths would be maximized and his weaknesses minimized. These adjustments included the following: giving simple individual instructions to Mohan about his work; providing him with a buddy so that a friendly relationship could be established; offering him opportunities to communicate with his peers in class; and always recognizing his efforts and achievements—a word of encouragement like 'Mohan, that's a good job!' will facilitate his motivation to maintain good behaviour and an appropriate attitude. Luckily, Mohan was able to follow his teachers' instructions and to perform according to his capabilities; in addition he soon became a favourite with his peers.

### ***A Few Words of Caution***

Generally, children with ADHD avoid work because they simply do not know how to do the given task. The key to helping them is to start from the basics, from where the child is stuck. For instance, if a child cannot do mathematical division, teach him or her the multiplication tables first. It takes tremendous effort and persistence to see outcomes, so be patient! Children with ADHD can be extremely moody, though at times they may behave like angels, keeping you wondering how they got the disorder. Some of them have abun-



*Self-esteem development programme at WINGS*

dant energy and may learn things very easily; but then, they also forget what they have learnt within minutes. Some adults may wrongly attribute this to laziness.

Doctors do say that too much sugar in children's diet can make them hyperactive. If you find that your child is a bit too restless, avoid sugary and fizzy drinks and excess of sweets and chocolates. Also, teach children from a young age the importance of keeping still in order to pay attention or to get concentrated, particularly at the time of praying, studying, and listening to teachers or other elders. This will teach them discipline.

Another characteristic of children with ADHD is display of aggressiveness. They may torment, hit, and push others, or snatch their things. Teachers and parents often become frustrated and exhausted dealing with these children. For that reason it is important to teach these children what is and is not proper behaviour, whether at school or in the playground; and this training has to begin at home. Remember that your children are watching you constantly. They are learning from their environment and will emulate what they see. Thus, parents should always guide their children and teach them what appropriate and inappropriate behaviour is through their own behaviour and practices.

### ***Helping Children with Learning Disorders***

Correctly diagnosing the child's problem is crucial. Often, this requires a team of professionals. If a teacher or a parent is concerned about a young child's inability to learn adequately, professional



## Causes for Poor Performance at School

- **Physical problems:** disturbed hearing, disturbed vision, silent epilepsy.
- **Dyslexia:** difficulties in reading and writing, irrespective of a high IQ level.
- **Low intelligence:** history of retarded physical development—delayed standing, talking, and so forth.
- **Environmental hindrances:** originating at school or at home.
- **ADHD:** poor concentration; overactive, restless, fidgety child.
- **Behavioural and emotional problems:** anxiety and disobedience.

help in the form of a physical or neurological examination should be sought. This may include a simple hearing or vision test.


A few years back a three-year-old boy, who was in kindergarten, was referred to us because he was not paying attention in class and living in a world of his own. He was a loner with limited language skills, unclear speech, and poor hand coordination; and he had no friends due to his habit of hitting, pushing, and spitting on other students. After a few observations made in the classroom setting and a few counselling sessions with the parents—with the purpose of finding out more about the developmental history of the child—it was jointly decided to send him for a neurological examination. The hearing test revealed that one of the child's ears was blocked with wax and a serous fluid. Within a month after the block was removed, the boy was speaking clearly, responding appropriately to teachers and parents, and reacting gently towards other students. This case illustrates that an early identification of children's problems facilitates a better prognosis.

Another diagnostic tool for children with learning disorders is the IQ test. Usually, IQ tests are done by a clinical or educational psychologist. As-

essment of speech and language abilities is also very important. If there is any speech-related difficulty, a speech therapist can help reduce it.

In Singapore, children who are identified as 'slow learners' in primary school are placed in a special programme called 'Guided—or Individualized—Programme' within the same school. Such programmes cater to the individual needs of the child. If a child has a special need, besides seeking professional support, parents should highlight his or her condition to the school and the teachers so that they can be more mindful of the child's needs. For example, a teacher who knows about a child's reading disability can spare him or her the humiliation of reading in front of an entire class.

To reiterate the point, parents who have children with special needs must play an active role in the children's everyday life and activities; parents should keep the lines of communication with their children's teachers constantly open.

If you have a child with special needs, your challenges are great indeed. After several attempts at trying to solve your child's problems without getting concrete results, you may feel frustrated, disappointed, and disheartened. But, as a parent, one thing you can certainly do: accept your child thoroughly and be conscious of his or her uniqueness. And above all, have faith in yourself and in your child's ability to succeed. 



**WINGS COUNSELLING CENTRE**

**SPECIALIZING IN COUNSELLING & PROGRAMMES FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH**

Our counselling programmes are individually tailored to fit the needs of our clients. The team behind WINGS Counselling Centre comprises of professionally qualified and dedicated people, who have years of practical experience, in a variety of areas.

WINGS adopts a holistic approach involving parents, teachers, friends and other family members when necessary.

展翅是新加坡少許的一家輔導中心專門提供兒童和青少年心理以及精神診斷。我們擁有經驗豐富的专业人員為您服務。我們採用全方面的輔導方式，如有必要，涉及家庭以及學校。

# East-West Dialectic and Swami Vivekananda

Swami Bhavaharananda

RECENTLY I came across two books of Nobel laureate Amartya Sen: *The Argumentative Indian* and *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*.<sup>1</sup> Through analytical discussion, he seeks to establish that the concept of an East-West schism is artificial and unprofitable. For him, the burgeoning developments in human society, scientific technology, and global economy permit a jettisoning of such concepts as an East-West divide. Economic development seems to be fostering a leap towards a common human community and universal welfare, and to be introducing a commercial attitude—the trait of modern society—the world over. Life-patterns are ever-more similar everywhere, with radio, television, mobile telephones, and the Internet, and continued developments in engineering, industry, medicine, communication, and information technology reaching ever-remoter corners of the globe. We are all journeying towards a world economy—though that has not yet been achieved. An East-West rivalry is growing in global leadership, business excellence, as well as political and other fields.

S Radhakrishnan, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose, and others have been included in Prof. Sen's discussions. I was sorry to see, however, that Sen has not examined Swami Vivekananda's ideas or contributions in either of the two books. We have to remember that Swami Vivekananda burst forth at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago long back—in 1893—as a bridge-builder between East and West. Vivekananda's proposal was a programme of exchange: giving Eastern spirituality to the West and Western science to the East, because each was lacking that which the other had in abundance. He was the first

to sketch a path towards the meeting of East and West, each nation to play its part in the harmony of nations, as he coined it—and, no doubt, the world is moving towards that. A new kind of universalism, hitherto unknown, is emerging.

Long before, Rudyard Kipling had become known for writing, in his 1889 'Ballad of East and West', 'Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet'. Less well known is the fact that he also added:

But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor  
Breed, nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face, tho'  
they come from the ends of the earth!

Since then, many a change has taken place across the rivers of time.

## Different Points of View

The East-West dichotomy is presently considered passé by many scholars. But a study of the linguistic, artistic, and literary traditions of the Eastern and Western hemispheres reveals some important differences in their respective attitudes towards life. Nolini Kanta Gupta (1889–1983), prolific writer and prominent disciple of Sri Aurobindo, writes synoptically in his essay 'East and West':

The East is spiritual by nature, while the West is inclined towards materialism. The East seeks for the world beyond. The West wants to possess this mundane world. Every rule, however, admits of exception, but that does not make it a sham. The same principle holds good here. The East is not wanting in epicures like Charvaka, nor is the West wanting in personages like Saint Francis. Nevertheless, on the whole it can be said that the life-current [Swami Vivekananda called it the life-centre] of the East tends towards the domain

beyond the senses, while that of the West is turned to the seekings of the senses. The East is firmly rooted in the eternal Truth. The West is familiar with the transient truths of the outer world. As a result of this difference the West has become skilful in action, lively and dynamic, and the East has become meditative, peace-loving and indifferent to life-activities. The present urge of mankind is to synthesise these different traits and to impart to the world at large a common, nobler and wider ideal. To-day we are convinced that these two different types of virtue are complementary to each other. The body without the soul is blind; the soul without the body is lame. The body must be infused with the spirit of the soul, and the dynamics of the soul must manifest itself through the body. This is indeed the ideal of the new synthesis.<sup>2</sup>

Gupta compares the literary geni of Valmiki and Shakespeare, taking them as exemplary representatives of their respective cultures. He finds that, while Shakespeare's protagonists—such as Hamlet, Macbeth, and King Lear—fully embody all that it is to be human, 'men as men are or would be', Valmiki's hero and heroine—Rama and Sita—symbolize a higher truth, and 'overflow the bounds of humanity'. Since we are ourselves human, we can 'grasp the clash of sentiments' that Hamlet faces; yet we are unable to measure the character of Rama, simple though it is. Gupta continues:

The East wants to explore the Infinite, while the West wants to delve into the finite. Homer, the father of Western Literature, is an illustrative example. The men of Homer's world, however mighty and powerful they may be, are after all human beings. Achilles and Hector are but the royal editions or dignified versions of our frail human nature. Never do they reflect the Infinite. The gift of the West is to bring to the fore the speciality of the finite through the senses. Plato himself did not like very much the Homeric God who to him was only 'human—all too human.'

Gupta then examines the East-West dichotomy through two representative works of art: the goddess Venus, and the Buddha in meditation:

The goddess Venus is no way superior to a human being. A finely modelled face, well-formed limbs,

beautifully chiselled nose, eyes, ears, forehead—in one word, she is the paragon of beauty. Softness and loveliness are reflected in her every limb. The Greek goddess marks the highest human conception of beauty and love. But the image of the Buddha is not entirely flawless. No doubt, it is the figure of a human being, but an anatomist will certainly be able to point out many defects and flaws of composition in it. The image of the Buddha in the state of deep self-absorption does not represent a *man* in contemplation, but it is a symbol of concentration; it is meditation personified. This is the special character of Oriental art. ... The Buddhist sculptor gives an expression to the supernatural state of realisation which the Buddha attained when he was on the verge of losing himself in Nirvana (1.254–5).

### Language, Myth, Science

The development of language and the cognitive processes involved in apprehension of meaning had been studied by ancient Indian rishis—Bhartrihari in particular—and they posited the theory of 'Sphota', the eternal, indivisible, and creative principle underlying all sound which also mediates the understanding of meaning of the spoken word. Modern linguists have also analysed the dynamics of language and meaning and have provided explanations that are often uncannily similar to those posited by Bhartrihari. The French thinker Henri Bergson (1859–1941) postulated an *élan-vital* or vital impetus, the force behind all life in the universe, which reminds us of 'Nada', the fundamental creative vibration of Indian philosophy. But neither language nor modern science has been able to give expression to the realization of the Ultimate. The famous scientist Wolfgang Pauli has confessed that even mathematics as a sign-language has failed to reflect all the realities that physicists have apprehended or conceived so far. So mathematics too has limits to its descriptive power. The rishis described Brahman as being '*avang-manasa-gocharam*, beyond the reach of speech and mind'. Even this universe is such, what to speak of the Absolute.

Mythology can be understood as a symbol-language of our subconscious mind. Though

present-day rationalists may claim that myth is no longer relevant, they ignore the power of myth to shape our views and attitudes, ideals and morals. Mythological stories throughout the world share common elements. For example, both Savitri and Orpheus follow their beloveds—Satyavan and Eurydice—to the netherworld to reclaim their lives. The description of the Rasa Yatra—Sri Krishna's lila with the gopis—has remarkable similarity to Solomon's 'Song of Songs' in the Torah. And Kali as symbol parallels some concepts of the Goddess as she was worshipped in Inca and Maya civilizations. Countless are the common threads running through the world's mythologies, reflecting the fundamental sameness of the human condition.

Scientific and economic development is still controlled, by and large, by affluent Western monopolists and nations—a community to which the East does not, as a whole, belong. Science is inherently universal, but has become an instrument in the hands of the powerful. It has not yet been able to successfully engage itself in promoting the welfare and development of a world community, but remains cocooned within market- and politically-driven aspirations.

### **Religion, Spirituality, and Vivekananda**

Prof. Sen seems to have overlooked the distinction between religion and spirituality. Religion is ethnic; spirituality is not. Spirituality is realization; not doctrines or dogmas, rituals or books, or temples or forms. Swami Vivekananda and Sri Ramakrishna insisted on this aspect of Vedanta and religion: transformation and realization as the essence of religion. Ordinary religion's ethnic basis leads to divisions and dogmas and doctrines. But in Vedanta philosophy, the journey is from religion to spirituality. In *Identity and Violence*, Dr Sen has discussed religious identity only from the ordinary, narrow standpoint. The broader aspect of the same topic was taken up by Radhakrishnan long before in his book *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*.<sup>3</sup>

Swami Vivekananda not only spoke eloquently about this universal aspect of spirituality in most of

his American lectures on Vedanta, but also categorically declared that the East would give its spiritual wealth to the West, and the West modern material sciences to the East. By religion he meant spirituality and not theology. These lectures are seminal contributions to the ongoing process of East-West exchange.

At present, the ordinary lives of people all over the world—their life patterns and living standards—are approaching some kind of commonality; but what is lacking is a movement towards inwardness as stipulated by Swami Vivekananda's vision of world evolution. The world has freely embraced only the extroverted life. And even that has not come to completion.

Swami Vivekananda describes the Suez Canal as being, on the material level at least, 'the link between Europe and Asia'—that is, the West and the East—in 'Reminiscences of European Travel'. He mentions Ferdinand de Lesseps (1805–94), the French diplomat who oversaw the completion of the canal, who was last in a long line of canal builders and would-be builders—a list which includes the utopian followers of early socialist thinker Henri de St Simon (1760–1825). Swamiji did not view himself as belonging to a particular nation: 'From Suez begins Asia. Once more Asia. What am I? Asiatic, European, or American? I feel a curious medley of personalities in me,' he writes on his final return journey to India. He rejected all such narrow self-definitions as nationality or race, defining characteristics though they be for most people. Though India and the East should accept Western scientific knowledge and practice, Swamiji never meant by this that mere materialism would save India; India's life-centre—which she must share with the world—remains the universal and transnational principles of Vedanta and spirituality. The words *civilization* and *culture* were for him more important than a cultic pattern of Hindu or any other religious or national ritual—he privileged culture over cult. Identifying cult with religion and culture has brought confusion into the modern world. Not religion, but the cultic outlook is the cause of violence. We shall



have to discard it sooner or later. Swami Vivekananda left a call for us all in this direction. Dr Sen might have missed it; but as a scholar he could have mentioned Swami Vivekananda as one of the pioneers of East-West harmony.

Much academic work has been done by scholars of both East and West over the years in African and Asian studies—remember Indologists and Orientalists like Max Müller and William Jones. Fields such as Egyptology, Tibetology, and Sinology were all built through traditions which cannot be wished away, though many of their presuppositions have since been challenged and suitably corrected. Vivekananda knew the multiverse and its diversity; yet he was aware of the unity within the depth of

the soul. Vivekananda's call evokes the Upanishads, and echoes across the tracts of time—'Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! ... Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings.'

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## East, West, and the Human Being

The West is groaning under the tyranny of the Shylocks, and the East is groaning under the tyranny of the priests; each must keep the other in check. Do not think that one alone is to help the world. In this creation of the impartial Lord, He has made equal every particle in the universe. The worst, most demoniacal man has some virtues which the greatest saint has not; and the lowest worm may have certain things which the highest man has not. The poor labourer, who you think has so little enjoyment in life, has not your intellect, cannot understand the Vedanta Philosophy and so forth; but compare your body with his, and you will see, his body is not so sensitive to pain as yours. If he gets severe cuts on his body, they heal up more quickly than yours would. His life is in the senses, and he enjoys there. His life also is one of equilibrium and balance. Whether on the ground of materialism, or of intellect, or of spirituality, the compensation that is given by the Lord to every one impartially is exactly the same. Therefore we must not think that we are the saviours of the world. We can teach the world, a good many things, and we can learn a good many things from it too. We can teach the world only what it is waiting for. ...

Apart from the different sects, philosophies, and scriptures, there is one underlying doctrine—the be-

lief in the soul of man, the Atman—common to all our sects; and that can change the whole tendency of the world. With Hindus, Jains, and Buddhists, in fact everywhere in India, there is the idea of a spiritual soul which is the receptacle of all power. And you know full well that there is not one system of philosophy in India which teaches you that you can get power or purity or perfection from outside; but they all tell you that these are your birthright, your nature. Impurity is a mere superimposition under which your real nature has become hidden. But the real *you* is already perfect, already strong. You do not require any assistance to govern yourself; you are already self-restrained. The only difference is in knowing it or not knowing it. Therefore the one difficulty has been summed up in the word, Avidya. What makes the difference between God and man, between the saint and the sinner? Only ignorance. What is the difference between the highest man and the lowest worm that crawls under your feet? Ignorance. That makes all the difference. For inside that little crawling worm is lodged infinite power, and knowledge, and purity—the infinite divinity of God Himself. It is unmanifested; it will have to be manifested.

—*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 3.158–9

# Consciousness in Advaita Vedanta

## Pravrajika Brahmaprana

(Continued from the previous issue)

THIS Upanishadic model of the fivefold sheath demonstrates not only a nuanced vocabulary of consciousness and cognition, which the West has yet to develop, but a fundamental disparity in the Western and Eastern approaches to probing the nature of consciousness. Today, most Western material scientists posit that human consciousness is an epiphenomenon of the brain. On the other hand, the Eastern system of Yoga-Vedanta maintains that consciousness does not originate in the brain—nor even in the mind, for that matter, because the mind merely passes on the light of consciousness. The brain, the mind, and the body are merely physical mediums for the expression of consciousness. Moreover, the Yoga-Vedanta system of psychology asserts that thought, which is a specific type of consciousness, is a function of the mind, not the brain.<sup>10</sup> ‘In the Vedantic view the mind is not a process,’ Swami Satprakashananda summarizes, ‘nor is it a function, or a state, or an attribute of something else. It is a positive substance, though not ultimately real. It has definite functions and states. It is one of the products of primordial nature, the potential cause of the universe, called prakṛti or māyā, *which has no consciousness inherent in it*’ [italics added] (72).

Furthermore, contemporary scientists maintain that human consciousness can only be objectively studied from the perspective of a third person, that is, an independent observer. This markedly limits the analysis of subjective phenomena and undoubtedly accounts for Western science’s three-hundred-year delay (after the inception of the scientific revolution) in examining human consciousness and the mind. On the other hand, Indic religious traditions such as Yoga-Vedanta uphold the premise that one’s own consciousness—disciplined and re-

financed through the path of yoga—is the clearest and most reliable lens for perceiving and grasping the nature of human and transcendental consciousness. For thousands of years mind and consciousness have been primary subjects of introspective investigation in the Indian subcontinent. Consequently, the Indian *ṛṣis* were able to develop sophisticated techniques for tracing the origin and nature of consciousness, which have been handed down from guru to disciple to the present day.

### Approaches to Consciousness

How, then, can we attain pure consciousness, the light of the Atman, by which we obtain the clearest perception of reality? Shankara, the Advaita Vedantin, prescribes the four traditional methods (*sādhana catuṣṭaya*) that, when perfected, mark the qualifications of a *ṛṣi*: (i) discrimination between the eternal and non-eternal; (ii) renunciation of the tendency towards sensual enjoyment; (iii) cultivation of the six treasures (tranquillity, self-control, mental poise, forbearance, faith, and self-surrender); and (iv) desire for liberation. Though all four qualifications work together as methods for refining, stabilizing, and elevating one’s mind, for the sake of brevity, we will focus only on the first two.

Vedanta scriptures exhort aspirants to first hear the truth, then contemplate it, and finally meditate upon it (*śravaṇa, manana, nididhyāsana*). To incorporate this technique into spiritual practice, Swami Turiyananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, once taught a young monastic how to study the Bhagavadgita: ‘Take one verse at a time, meditate on its meaning, and live the verse for a week before going on to the next verse.’<sup>11</sup> By studying an entire scripture in this way, an aspirant refines and deepens the faculty of introspection, imbibes the

spiritual truth of the passage, and thus activates and sustains a spiritual current of thought throughout the day. By developing subtlety of mind, one unleashes the powers of the mind.

To strengthen and unsheathe the *buddhi* from its weakening and covering delusions forged through many lives, the aspirant, under the guidance of a qualified teacher, also practices the method of negating all impermanent, unreal phenomena superimposed on the supreme reality (*neti neti ātmā*). Beginning with gross phenomena and gradually proceeding to more subtle elements, the aspirant, through logic and willpower, peels back the several layers of superimposition (*adhyāropa*) veiling the underlying reality of Atman-Brahman, and gradually renounces them all, both physically and mentally. This is a process that involves two steps: by negating the attributes of the non-Self, one unfolds the essential nature of the Self, or Atman; and by negating the conditions and qualities of the relative

world, one discovers the nature of Brahman. Sri Ramakrishna demonstrated in his life the unconscious effects of this practice when steadfastly performed in a conscious and uncompromising way. 'When I meditated under the bel-tree,' Sri Ramakrishna confided to his disciple M, 'I used to see various visions clearly. One day I saw in front of me money, a shawl, a tray of sandesh, and two women. I asked my mind, "Mind, do you want any of these?" I saw the sandesh to be mere filth. One of the women had a big ring in her nose. I could see both their inside and outside—entrails, filth, bone, flesh, and blood. The mind did not want any of these—money, shawl, sweets or women. It remained fixed ... [on] God.'<sup>12</sup>

Self-inquiry (*ātma vicāra*) is the technique of probing into the nature of the seer and the seen to end the identification between the subject and the object (*dr̥g-dr̥śya-viveka*); of rigorously analysing the three states of consciousness (waking, dream, and dreamless sleep) in order to gain insight into

## Mind and Consciousness

**T**he fundamental difference between Western and Eastern psychology is that the former *does not*, and the latter *does differentiate Mind from Consciousness*. On the contrary Western psychology interprets Mind in terms of Consciousness, that is Consciousness is the distinctive character of Mind. Where Mind and Consciousness are used as equivalents the one of the other, ordinary experience is of course meant and not pure *Cit* or supreme unconditioned Consciousness. The Western 'Mind' is something for which there is no adequate Sanskrit equivalent since the notions are different. When I speak of Mind in Vedānta I refer to what is explained later as the 'Inner Instrument' (*Antahkaraṇa*) as distinguished from the 'outer instruments' (*Bāhyakaraṇa*) or senses on the one hand, and on the other hand from Consciousness of which both mind and senses are instruments.

The term Mind bears a narrower as well as a wider meaning in the Śāstras. Thus in the saying 'from where speech together with mind (*Manas*) withdraws failing to reach' (referring to Brahman) the word *Manas* (mind) is evidently used for the whole 'Inner Instrument'. In strictly philosophical literature however, the term *Manas* is al-

most always used in a defined sense so that it cannot be translated into 'Mind' as understood by Western psychologists. It is only then one function of the inner instrument. Indian 'Mind' is distinguished from Western Mind in this that the former as such is not Consciousness but a material force enveloping Consciousness, the two in association producing the Consciousness-unconsciousness of Western Mind. Pure Consciousness (*Cit*) is not an attribute of Mind. It is beyond Mind being independent of it. It is immanent in Mind and is the source of its illumination and apparent Consciousness. ...

According to the Vedānta ... *Cit* is pure consciousness Itself. Mind is a real or apparent negation or limitation or determination of that. Mind in fact, in itself, that is considered as apart from *Cit* (from which in fact it is never separate) is an *unconscious force* which in varying degree obscures and limits consciousness, such limitation being the condition of all finite experience. *Cit* is thus Consciousness. Mind is Consciousness *plus* Unconsciousness, the intermingled Consciousness-unconsciousness which we see in all finite being.

—Sri John Woodroffe, *The World as Power*, 145–8

that which is common to them, the witness-self; and of methodically examining the threefold body and fivefold sheath in order to renounce one's outer coverings and trace one's 'I-consciousness' back to its source, the Self. These spiritual disciplines demand the utmost clarity of intellect and willpower—the sword of discrimination being ever unsheathed to pierce the subtle delusions of the conscious, subconscious, and even unconscious mind. 'The discipline of negation must be practised without intermission,' stipulates Swami Nikhilananda in his comprehensive 'Introduction' to Shankara's *Self-Knowledge* (*Ātmabodha*), 'as long as even a dreamlike perception of the universe and the finite soul remains, and as long as identification with the body is not totally wiped out. Neither sleep nor concern about secular matters nor attachment to sense-objects should be given the slightest opportunity to let one forget the nature of the real Self.'<sup>13</sup>

Ramprasad, the Bengali poet-saint, wrote a song which Sri Ramakrishna used to sing, demonstrating how discrimination, when properly performed, enables the aspirant to retain the witness-consciousness throughout the three states of consciousness:

Once for all, this time, I have thoroughly  
understood;  
From One who knows it well, I have learnt the  
secret of bhāva.  
A man has come to me from a country where  
there is no night,  
And now I cannot distinguish day from night  
any longer;  
Rituals and devotions have all grown profitless  
for me.  
My sleep is broken; how can I slumber any more?  
For now I am wide awake in the sleeplessness of  
yoga.  
O Divine Mother, made one with thee in yoga-  
sleep<sup>14</sup> at last,  
My slumber I have lulled to sleep for evermore.<sup>15</sup>

The discrimination and renunciation of a spiritual aspirant is tested through the practice of karma yoga. In the field of selfless action one attempts to drive home the non-dual Vedanta perception of reality through dedicated action and, in doing so,

learns how much the Advaita Vedanta ideal is actually instilled and reflected in one's unconscious habits and reactions. Seclusion can be a safe haven for a practitioner of Vedanta—in it one feels comfortable with one's own spiritual prowess—but in the field of action, shortcomings and weaknesses quickly manifest and are, therefore, easier to detect and eradicate. For this reason, including the practice of karma yoga in one's daily life is more beneficial than limiting one's spiritual disciplines to only study and meditation. At the same time, the practice of karma yoga unaccompanied by regular meditation quickly deteriorates into mere meritorious acts of karma.

Advaitic meditations vary according to the temperament and capacity of the aspirant. With repeated practice, Self-inquiry (*ātma-vicāra*) advances to a meditative state. The practice of constant self-awareness—witnessing each state of consciousness—is the *pratibodha* technique of mindfulness, known also as *vipaśyana*.<sup>16</sup> Its roots can be found in the *Kena Upanishad*: 'Brahman is known when It is realized in every state of the mind; for by such Knowledge one attains Immortality' (*pratibodha viditam matam*).<sup>17</sup> Behind all thought and action is the witness-self, which also becomes manifest to the aspirant who, when sufficiently advanced, can at will sustain the interval between two thoughts.

In the Upanishads, there are symbolic Advaitic meditations known as *vidyās*, which train the mind of the aspirant to search beneath the coverings of various external objects—such as honey (*madhu*), the sun (*āditya*), and fire (*pañcāgni*)—their common spiritual core. In these meditation techniques, which focus on the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm, the practitioners attempt to identify their own centre of consciousness with Saguna Brahman (Brahman with attributes). For example, the *madhu vidyā*—meditation on honey, or sweetness, or bliss—begins: 'This earth is honey for all beings, and all beings are honey for this earth. The intelligent, immortal being, the soul of this earth, and the intelligent, immortal being, the soul of the individual being—each is honey to the other.



Brahman is the soul in each; he indeed is the Self in all. He is all.<sup>18</sup>

Each successive step of the *madhu vidyā*—meditation on water, fire, air, sun, space, moon, lightning, thunder, ether, law, truth, the human race, and the Self as *madhu*—focuses on the correlation between these respective elements, expanded to their universal aspects, and the Self within every being and the whole of creation. The intrinsic thread running through all is Atman-Brahman, the culmination of the *vidyā* or meditation. Sri Ramakrishna disclosed some of the meditations he had learned from his teacher of Vedanta, Tota Puri:


Nangtā [Tota Puri] used to tell me how a jñāni meditates: Everywhere there is water; all the regions above and below are filled with water; man, like a fish, is swimming joyously in that water. In real meditation you will actually see all this.

Take the case of the infinite ocean. There is no limit to its water. Suppose a pot is immersed in it: there is water both inside and outside the pot. The jñāni sees that both inside and outside there is nothing but Paramātman. Then what is this pot? It is 'I-consciousness.' Because of the pot the water appears to be divided into two parts; because of the pot you seem to perceive an inside and an outside. One feels that way as long as this pot of 'I' exists. When the 'I' disappears, what *is* remains. That cannot be described in words.

Do you know another way a jñāni meditates? Think of infinite ākāśa and a bird flying there, joyfully spreading its wings. There is the Cidākāśa and Ātman is the bird. The bird is not imprisoned in a cage; it flies in the Cidākāśa. Its joy is limitless.<sup>19</sup>

Self-inquiry culminates in the unitive knowledge revealed by the four Vedic aphorisms (*mahāvākyas*) stated in the Upanishads: 'That thou art' (*tat-tvam-asi*); 'I am Brahman' (*aham brahmāsmi*); 'Pure Consciousness is Brahman' (*prajñānam brahma*); and 'This Self is Brahman' (*ayam-ātmā brahma*). Each of the ten Vedantic monastic orders founded by Shankaracharya is associated with one of these Vedic dictums, which is transmitted from guru to disciple at the time of sannyasa. Before that, the novice undergoes years of rigorous spiritual train-

ing to purify the mind, in order that it may be receptive to these higher truths. At the time of sannyasa, when the guru utters one of the *mahāvākyas*, the disciple is then better able to receive the realization of truth that the mantra imparts. 'The Self ... is to be known,' Yajnavalkya exhorts his wife Maitreyi in the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, 'Hear about it, reflect upon it, meditate upon it. By knowing the Self, my beloved, through hearing, reflection, and meditation, one comes to know all things.'<sup>20</sup>

By uninterrupted meditation on these great Vedic dictums, desires are obliterated, and we receive the highest realization of pure consciousness, known as *nirvikalpa samādhi*. The mind's reflection of pure consciousness reverts back to its source of light, the Self-luminous Brahman, just as our face, when reflected in a broken mirror, reverts back to our face itself. Subject and object—pure consciousness and perceived consciousness—become one. At last we discover that the ocean of pure consciousness that we had thought was outside ourselves is, in reality, within. We are by nature Brahman—eternal, free, ever-blissful—the One-without-a-second. 

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# ***Ethics, Universalism, and Spirituality***

**Dr V V Rampal**

**S**PIRITUALITY is grounded in a value system that is both ethical and universal, and that includes positive ideals like peaceful growth, equitable distribution of resources, individual perfection, and a just social order. Such a system aims at proper management of thought and action, maintenance of good personal and social conduct, and tolerant interpersonal behaviour to avoid confrontation. Most religions accept this universal value system as the basis of a religious life; such a life manifests universal brotherhood, truth, justice, tolerance, sharing of resources, and service to humanity. Ethics and universal outlook form two important landmarks in the spiritual journey: ethics as the starting point and universal behaviour as a sign of achievement in the journey of transformation towards perfection. The inner journey to self-realization is incomplete without these characteristic features of personal improvement.

## ***Ethics***

In a capitalist society, the lure of money deals heavy blows to the practice of ethical and moral values in everyday life. At the same time, excessive stress on and indulgence in monetary pursuits results in a sense of dissatisfaction and emptiness at heart, a discontent that drives one to seek spiritual solace. In a money-obsessed environment, spirituality becomes identified mostly with matters related to yogic healing, healthy dietary habits, and moral preaching. But spirituality per se is much more than mere ethics and morality: it is about inner transformation. Maintaining a healthy body and observing good social behaviour are not the aims of spiritual life, though they are necessary preliminary requirements. The goal is much higher than mere concerns about a healthy body and mind. Spiritual-

ity is about self-realization, the sacred relationship with the supreme cause, the identification with the cosmic whole, the ultimate reality of one existence. Possession of a sharp intellect with vast knowledge of the material world does not necessarily reflect a spiritual bent of mind. Spirituality is about experience of the inner truth and not merely knowledge of scriptures or religious practices of one or more religions of the world. It is a turning from outer experience to inner vision. It is an extrasensory perception, revealing a reality that is at once intuitive, beyond reason and argument, self-illuminating, timeless, and all-embracing. As the Upanishads say, it is something after knowing which nothing remains to be known. With such a lofty goal, would it be right for anyone to limit the scope of spirituality to mere concerns about body and social interaction? No doubt, the vehicle is important to its occupant, yet the ideals and goals of the occupant have a different dimension than the mere mechanics of movement. The destination is determined by the occupant. Let not obsessive involvement with the vehicle obscure the purpose of possessing it. If the destination is forgotten, the vehicle will be useful only for aimless wandering and occasional accidents—and the consequent suffering.

Just as a vehicle is important for ease of movement, body-centric thinking is relevant to maintaining a healthy body for trouble-free pursuit of higher goals. A healthy mind is important for a healthy body. The practice of yoga asanas and ethical living contribute to physical and mental health. But for spiritual growth, these are essential aids and not the goal. It is like finding the first oasis in a desert and making it one's permanent abode, completely forgetting the onward journey to the 'promised land'. It is a sign of weakness of purpose to rest at

the first opportunity for comfort. In any purposeful journey, there are always temptations that need to be resisted if one is to move forward. The weak will always find excuses to justify the termination of a journey short of the desired goal, particularly when the journey is difficult and the goal difficult to envisage. That is why it is said in the scriptures that one in thousands embarks on the journey, and out of these only one in thousands reaches the goal. But the result is worth the journey.

Ethics and morality, leading to good conduct in society, become the predominant theme of many religious streams, specially the ones in which enjoying heaven after death is considered the goal of life. These streams help to keep alive a value system that aims to reduce the tensions and stresses of everyday life and emphasizes love and compassion as universal values. Good personal and social conduct is indeed the ends and means of many a religious thought, and very rightly so. But for those who aim higher than heaven, and wish to seek and unite with the ultimate reality—to experience it directly—good conduct is only the beginning of a long journey of hard struggle. For them, ethical conduct and healthy body are only prerequisites for internal development that leads to intuitive experience of the ultimate reality. Again, ethical living is necessary not because of social pressures, or a controlling authority that oversees people's behaviour, but because it promotes a tranquil and peaceful mind. Unethical behaviour is disturbing, makes the mind agitated and tense, and renders one unfit for spiritual life. Even in one's day-to-day work, one needs a cool and contented frame of mind to make proper decisions. Ethical living is therefore necessary for right thinking and right action. Ethical action must be embedded so deeply in one's mind that it becomes a routine and involuntary response to all behavioural inputs to one's personality. Only then can one be prepared adequately to embark on the journey to self-realization.

### **Universality**

Universality is an essential element of spirituality. Unlike the individuality-conscious mind that

thinks and acts in self-interest, the spiritual person is essentially universal in thought and action. The reasoning mind is analytical and discriminative, and gets caught in details, while the intuitive mind is unifying and all-embracing. But the transition from reasoning to intuition is not automatic: the wide gap between the two must be bridged by self-effort. Without abandoning the sense of individuality, one cannot embody universal awareness. It takes conscious effort to discard habitual thinking patterns and become receptive to universal existence. Most saints are impractical in the world of individuality and self-interest. They sacrifice everything just to maintain their sacred relationship with the Supreme. A truly spiritual person is a person of universal love and compassion for all, irrespective of consequences to his or her personal self.


The Upanishads repeatedly emphasize the universal nature of existence. From that standpoint, the whole of humanity and all living beings are part of one existence. Affecting one part affects the whole. The individualistic existence that centres on selfishness and greed is not only an impediment to personal spiritual growth, but is detrimental to the existence of others as well. True religion is universal in content. It respects and is sensitive to the needs of all people, and wants external and internal peace for all. At the same time, it does not conflict with well-established scientific discoveries and facts which have helped discard ignorance-based superstitions and beliefs. Religion need not clash with rational thinking, though it be grounded in faith.

Science explores truth through the reason-based conscious mind, while spirituality seeks truth revealed to the intuitive mind. Discovered truth and revealed truth are both truth, yet springing from two different states of mind. Putting faith in one and discarding the other is a matter of choice. In both cases, however, truth is universal. The test of universality is a must for any 'truth' to be accepted. If it violates this criterion, then there are strong grounds for doubting its validity. Universal truth is always unifying. It answers all doubts and enquiries satisfactorily, leaving no ground for individual

preferences or motivated interpretations. The value system encompassing truth, justice, freedom, equality, fraternity, and love has universal appeal. It is therefore an essential part of spiritual life. Any behaviour that negates these principles on grounds of self- or group-interest can be considered unethical and unbefitting a spiritual aspirant.

One measure of spiritual growth is the progress one makes in rising above selfish desires such as desire for accumulation of material wealth. After all, material riches belong fundamentally to the whole of humanity. Spirituality enjoins a movement towards oneness and universal existence. Vedanta duly emphasizes this. Surrender to the Supreme—a foundational spiritual practice—is possible only when the individual self is subordinated to the universal will. When individual desires rule one's thinking, universality and spirituality remain absent in thought and action. This is the veil that needs to be lifted to enter the domain of spiritual-

ity. Only when one is universal in speech, thought, and action can one hope to claim being spiritual. By looking within, one opens oneself to universality, omnipresence, and freedom. Self-realization makes us universal and free at once. Wealth and power are only loaned to us by nature. Let us not claim sole ownership of them.

Spirituality demands integration of knowledge, integration of mind and matter, and ultimately, integration of all existence. It reveals the substratum of all changing realities. Gross material existence is a realm of ever greater limitation. In the process of expansion, one experiences increasing degrees of subtleness, leading to the ultimate existence in superconsciousness. The spiritual path is therefore a journey towards universality in the extreme, where there are no barriers of limitation, restriction, or finiteness. It is a process by which a part realizes that it is one with the Whole, and all distinctions between one and the other are obliterated forever. 

## Sri Ramakrishna's Universality

**S**ri Ramakrishna was a simple unlettered man, who was also a genius and a saint: he never desired learning, but from early youth strove after the sight of God, and longed to dive into the hidden reality behind phenomena. And ultimately a wonderful light came to him. He had a distrust of the intellectual faculties as a means of bringing men to God, and he proved how love can guide us into all Truth—to a perfect state of expansion of the self into universal and eternal relations. ... The vision came to the Master, but it did not come unsought. It was prepared for and gained by an unconditional self-surrender and a severe course of training. His real strong yearning and the self-discipline which he considered necessary for the development of inward revelation, is a most precious example, and shows to what regions of spiritual knowledge they conducted him.

He was a man who never stirred in others a feeling of jealousy or antagonism: who seemed to have the power of making those who served him feel honoured in their service: who always called out the love and dignity of his followers. He taught his lessons by example rather

than by argument, and demonstrated that salvation is and can be nothing else but the birth of light and love. He possessed the truth that *sees* God, and the love that delights in God. All perishable things he set at one price, and valued gold no more than a handful of sand. ...

Sri Ramakrishna brought to its highest perfection the faculty of spiritual vision, the contemplation of the Light invisible. During the nineteenth century he was the most influential preacher of our eternal religion and principles, and his life and teachings which contain the kernel of spirituality have inaugurated a reform so far-reaching and important that it is difficult to realise their full significance. In preaching the Advaita aspect of Vedanta he brought out the Eternal grand idea of the Oneness of the universe, that all is but One Existence, and each one of us according to his different nature can tend to increase the harmony of Unity, which must arise from various instruments, sounds and voices. Behind every one, there is that Infinite soul, assuring the possibility and the infinite capacity of all to become good and perfect.

—*Prabuddha Bharata*, June 1908, 112–13





## Girishchandra Ghosh: As an Actor (1867–1879)

Swami Chetanananda

GIRISHCHANDRA Ghosh was the founder of the modern theatre in Bengal, and he supported several theatres in Calcutta by acting and writing plays over a period of almost half a century. The *Bengalee* magazine wrote about Girish in 1912: 'He was not only the

founder of the Bengalee stage, but also its preserver. About forty-five years ago he appeared in the inimitable role of "Nimchand" [in *Sadhabar Ekadashi*, a social drama by Dinabandhu Mitra] before a cultured audience including the author, and when he awoke the next morning he found himself famous as an actor.'<sup>1</sup>

Let us take a look at some of the history of the Bengali entertainment industry and its status prior to Girish's advent. Calcutta was then the capital of British India. For their own recreation and amusement, the English established the Chowringhee Theatre in 1813 and the Sans Souci Theatre in 1839. But those theatres were mainly patronized by Westerners. Only on rare occasions would Indian aristocrats such as Prince Dwarakanath Tagore and others go there. The Bengalis enjoyed their own traditional entertainments: *yatra*, open-air theatre; *panchali*, poems celebrating the glory of a deity that are set to music; and *kavi-gan*, a song tournament between two composers. Bengali dramatists learned from the English theatre how to change the backdrop between acts. Excited by this novelty, they introduced it in their performances.<sup>2</sup>

In 1831, Navin Chandra Basu of Shyambazar,

Calcutta, a very wealthy man, arranged a dramatic performance based on Bharatchandra Roy's *Vidyasundar*. There was no change of backdrop as in Western theatres; instead, he set different scenes in his palace, his garden, and other places. For example, the parlour of the palace served as the court of King Virsingha; near the pond, the hero Vidyasundar sat under a *bakul* tree; in the garden was a small cottage for the heroine, Malini; and the backyard was the scene of a cremation ground; then there was an artificial tunnel from one spot to another, and so on. As the actors and actresses moved from one scene to another, so did the audience. This was something that people had never seen before. In addition, courtesans acted in the female roles, which amazed the audience. Some puritans did not approve of courtesans appearing onstage, so they wrote letters to newspapers protesting this practice (46).

In 1832, Professor Horace Hayman Wilson of the Sanskrit College translated Bhavabhuti's *Uttararamacharita* (a drama about Ramachandra) from Sanskrit into English, and his students performed the play at Prasanna Tagore's garden house. Gradually students from the Hindu College and the Oriental Seminary were trained by Western professors to enact various plays of Shakespeare. As these dramas were in English, most Bengalis could not enjoy them. At that time there were no good Bengali plays that could be performed for the masses.

In Bengal during the middle of the nineteenth century, upper-class brahmanas were permitted to have more than one wife. To gain prestige, many parents were eager to marry their daughters into upper-caste families. But the dreadful custom of polygamy degraded Bengali society and brought tremendous pain to the women involved. To assist

in eradicating this practice, Kalichandra Roychoudhury, a wealthy philanthropist of the Rangpur district in Bengal, advertised in the *Rangpur Barta-baha* newspaper: 'Any scholar or playwright who can write a play under the title *Kulin-kula-sarvasva* (a high-caste family) in Bengali within six months will be awarded fifty rupees.' Pandit Ramnarayan Tarkaratna wrote the play and collected the money. His play was first performed in 1857 at Jairam Basak's house in Pathuriaghata, Calcutta.

At this time, the English had two theatres in Calcutta: the Theatre Royal and the Opera House. The American actress Mrs G B W Lewis rented the Theatre Royal and started an acting troupe. An excellent actress, she attracted many high-ranking British government officials to her performances. She was a close friend of Mr Atkinson, a fellow American, and she visited his office quite often while Girish was an accountant there. Mrs Lewis made a good deal of money, and she engaged Girish to keep her personal accounts. She became fond of Girish and invited him to her theatre, where his talent gradually emerged as he watched the Western plays performed there. Mrs Lewis was amazed as she listened to his opinions about the Western actors and actresses (93–4).

From 1857 to 1867, wealthy Bengalis in Calcutta staged plays in their homes. Competing for social status, these rich patrons would arrange theatrical performances in their luxurious homes and invite friends and dignitaries to attend. For example, Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* was enacted at Chatu Babu's house in Simla; Bhattanarayana's *Veni-sambhara* at Kaliprasanna Singha's home; Madhusudan Datta's *Ratnavali* and *Sharmishtha* at the Belgachia garden house of Paikpara Maharaja; *Bidhaba-bibaha* at Gopallal Mallick's house in Sinduriapati under the direction of Keshab Chandra Sen; *Malavika-agnimitra*, *Vidyasundar*, *Malati-madhava*, and *Rukmini-haran* in Maharaja Jatindranath Tagore's house at Pathuriaghata; *Nava-natak* at Dwarakanath Tagore's house at Jorasanko; and *Krishna-kumari* at the Shobhabazar palace (48).

These theatre patrons spent a huge amount of

money to provide the stage, backdrops, and costumes, and to hire experienced actors and actresses. Many people were eager to see these plays, but the wealthy hosts were afraid that crowds would cause problems at the performances. So they distributed free tickets to their relatives, friends, admirers, and distinguished guests. Middle-class play-lovers were excluded. Moreover, anyone who tried to sneak into the theatre hall was humiliated by the guards and thrown out. Girish told a story about how one of his neighbours procured a ticket for a play being performed at Jatindranath Tagore's house in Pathuriaghata. He showed that ticket to all the neighbours and surprised them by describing how artfully he had obtained it.

Young Girish came from a middle-class family and did not have much money, so he could not attend the plays performed in the houses of those aristocrats. Thus he developed an intense desire to start a public theatre. Eventually he found the opportunity to fulfil his wish through his neighbour, Nagendra Nath Bandyopadhyay, who started a concert party in his house. When Girish expressed his idea of opening a public theatre to Nagendra, he responded enthusiastically.

It is very expensive to establish a theatre because it needs a stage, costumes, backdrops for the different scenes of plays, and so on. But yatra does not need a permanent stage or any backdrops. So in 1867, Girish, Nagendra Nath Bandyopadhyay, Dharmadas Sur, Radhamadhav Kar, and some other friends established an amateur yatra party in Baghbazar and decided to perform *Sharmishtha*, a play by Michael Madhusudan Datta. They needed some songs to be sung with that play, so they went to the famous composer Priyamadhav Basu Mallick. He refused to provide any songs, despite repeated requests. Girish was disgusted. He said to his friend Umesh Chandra Choudhury, 'Why so much hassle? Come, let us compose some songs.' This was the first time Girish composed songs for a play—and he soon became famous for his compositions.

*Sharmishtha* was performed off and on in Baghbazar for almost a year. Girish said to Nagendra,

'Look, we have been successful with this yatra. Now let us establish a theatre.' Nagendra replied, 'We need backdrops and expensive costumes. Where shall we get the money?' Girish came up with an idea: He proposed that they enact *Sadhabar Ekdashi*. This play required only ordinary clothes, not expensive costumes. And as for backdrops, they could find some cloth and paint the backdrops themselves. Girish's passion inspired his young friends. Since he was the oldest among the group, they made him their leader and director of the party. Girish founded the Baghbazar Amateur Theatre group, which is considered the first public theatre in Bengal. He then recruited actors and actresses who had performed in *Sharmishtha* and started holding rehearsals at Arun Haldar's house in Baghbazar. At this time he had a full-time job at the Atkinson Company and was engaged in rehearsing from evening to midnight. He also composed a few songs to introduce the play. Then Ardendu Shekhar Mustafi, a famous actor, joined Girish in the venture.

During Durga Puja in October 1869, the group performed *Sadhabar Ekdashi* in Prankrishna Haldar's house at Baghbazar. In this drama Girish played the role of Nimchand, a drunkard. Girish's portrayal was so realistic that through this role he first made a name for himself as an actor. He said to the stage manager before the performance, 'I cannot portray a drunkard if I have to drink coloured water from a bottle on stage. I want genuine wine.' The result was that even the writer of the play was overwhelmed by Girish's performance. He told Girish, 'This role seems to have been written for you, and without you the play would not be a success.'<sup>3</sup> The role of Nimchand involved reciting several long passages from English literature, which was not possible for an ordinary Bengali actor. Girish was fluent in English and the audience was spellbound listening to his British diction.<sup>4</sup>

At that time the young people of Bengal were blindly imitating Western culture, etiquette, language, and habits. They would quote Lord Byron, the celebrated English poet: 'Man, being reasonable,

must get drunk; The best of life is but intoxication'; and, 'O pleasure! you are indeed a pleasant thing.'

Young people believed that anyone who did not drink alcohol was uncivilized and uneducated. Drinking wine and enjoying the pleasures of the senses became their goals. Girish also fell victim to this Western influence. But people of the older generation were shocked and tried to save their children from this hedonism. The poet Pyarimohan Kaviraj wrote:

Don't drink, don't drink!  
Don't touch, don't touch!  
Wine is evil, a killer:  
Listen to me, O dear brother.<sup>5</sup>

When the first two cantos of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* were published, Byron wrote in his memoir, 'I awoke one morning and found myself famous.' Similarly, Girish became a celebrity overnight after the first performance of *Sadhabar Ekdashi*. After its initial success in Baghbazar, the play was performed in different venues throughout Calcutta. Observing the success of *Sadhabar Ekdashi*, some critics told Girish, 'It is easy to act while listening to the prompter hiding behind the screen in a theatre, but it is not so easy in a yatra, where the stage is in the middle and the audience is seated all around it.' This agitated Girish, and he took it as a challenge. He told his critics that he would produce a yatra ready for performance in eight days. Whenever he was challenged, his creative faculty prevailed. It was not his nature to do anything half-heartedly. He immediately consulted with his friends and decided to perform a yatra based on *Ushaharan* by Radhanath Mitra. That same night, he composed twenty-six songs for the play. He also hired two famous singers, a musician, and a popular actor. Rehearsals were held day and night. As promised, on the day of Jagaddhatru Puja in 1869, the yatra was performed with great enthusiasm at Nagendra Bandyopadhyay's house in Baghbazar.<sup>6</sup>

In 1871, Girish and his party changed the name of their theatre company to the National Theatre and staged Dinabandhu Mitra's *Lilavati* with

great *éclat*. A permanent stage was built at Rajendranath Pal's house in Shyambazar; and Dharma-das Sur painted the backdrops with the help of an English sailor. Girish arranged to buy appropriate costumes for the play, and himself directed it. He also performed in the role of Lalit, the main character. Although men acted in the female roles, it was a hit on the first night. Dr Mahendralal Sarkar, Dinabandhu Mitra, and many other distinguished people were present. After the performance, Dinabandhu said to Girish, 'I did not know that one could read my poem in such a magnificent way. Please take this compliment at least.'<sup>7</sup> *Lilavati* continued for five nights, but was interrupted by rain. The last performance was held during Durga Puja at Mathuramohan Biswas's house at Shyambazar.<sup>8</sup>

On 7 December 1872, the National Theatre was officially inaugurated with Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nildarpan*. This play dramatized the exploitation of Indians by British indigo merchants. For this play tickets were sold to the public. At first Girish was against this, but he told his friends that he had no objection to the sale of tickets, provided the theatre was as well-equipped as other professional companies. The National Theatre next staged Michael Madhusudan Datta's *Krishnakumari*, a historical play about a Rajput princess. Girish's friends asked him to play King Bhimsingha, the main role. He agreed on the condition that he would not take any money and that his name would not be printed in the programme. So 'A distinguished amateur' was printed next to the name of his character. *Krishnakumari* was staged on 22 February 1873; Michael Madhusudan Datta was present on the opening night. After the play, he warmly greeted Girish and praised his acting. Raja Chandranath Roy Bahadur of Natore was so impressed with Girish's performance that he presented Girish with a royal costume and sword (78–82).

When Girish acted in any role, he would use his powerful imagination, intense concentration, and deep insight to identify with the character. As a result, the audience witnessed a living character on the stage. This God-given faculty made

Girish a genius as an actor, playwright, and spiritual seeker. Abinash Gangopadhyay, Girish's biographer and secretary, commented on Girish's performance as Bhimsingha in the drama *Krishnakumari*: 'Losing his only daughter, Krishnakumari, Maharaja Bhimsingha became mad with grief. He shouted his enemy's name thrice: "Mansingha—Mansingha—Mansingha!" When he uttered the name "Mansingha" the first time, it was as if he was visualizing a shadow of his enemy; the second time, a luminous form; and the third time, a living form. Immediately he took his sword from its scabbard, and shouted, "I shall destroy you right now!" Some spectators in the first row were so overwhelmed with fear that they fell off their chairs, and one lost consciousness' (81–2).

On 3 February 1873, Thomas George Baring, Earl of Northbrook and the Governor General of India, laid the foundation stone for a new hospital in Calcutta. Dr MacNamara requested local leaders to raise money to complete the construction. In response, Girish and his friends staged *Nildarpan* by Dinabandhu Mitra at the Town Hall on 29 March 1873. This benefit performance raised seven hundred rupees for the hospital. Girish acted in the role of Mr I I Wood, and his speech, movements, and gestures appeared to be those of a European. On 31 March 1873, an art critic wrote in *The Englishman*:

On Saturday night the members of the Calcutta National Theatre performed in the Town Hall the play of 'Nil Darpan', for the benefit of the Native Hospital. It is a great pity that so short a notice was given, as, on that account, very few Europeans were present. However, the natives mustered very strongly on the occasion and testified by their repeated plaudits how much they enjoyed the performance. The acting was exceedingly good throughout. We hope the Management will give another performance shortly (89–90).

On 10 May 1873, the National Theatre was about to perform a play based on Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's famous novel *Kapalkundala* at Raja Radhakanta Dev's house in Calcutta. The audience



filled the hall and the performers were ready to go onstage; but the manuscript of the play was missing. It was an embarrassing moment. The lead actors rushed to their director, Girish, and begged him to save the situation. Girish asked someone to bring a copy of *Kapalkundala* from the Raja's library. When it arrived, he told the cast members, 'Have no fear. I shall hide in the wings and read you the parts. Go to the stage now.' Girish's biographer wrote: '*Kapalkundala* was staged smoothly, and the audience did not realize the problem behind the scenes. Only Girish could have created and prompted the dialogue of the entire play' (91).

Girish was involved in several Calcutta theatres. Sharat Chandra Ghosh, who established the Bengal Theatre, formed a committee with prominent people of Calcutta such as Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Michael Madhusudan Datta, Umesh Chandra Datta, Pandit Satyavrata Samasrami, and others. Vidyasagar had seen dramas such as *Bidhaba Bibaha* (widow-marriage) and *Nava Natak* (new drama), and realized that plays like these could help to eradicate social superstitions. When Sharat began to build the structure that would house the Bengal Theatre, Madhusudan started writing a play for it entitled *Mayakanan* (a garden of maya). But when Sharat tried to find some boys to play the female roles, Madhusudan told him, 'The play will not be natural if boys act in the female roles. These parts should be played by women.' At that time respectable women did not work in the theatre. After a long debate, the actors agreed to appear onstage with actresses who they presumed would be courtesans. Vidyasagar, however, disapproved of this and left the committee. Shortly after Madhusudan finished the drama, he fell ill. He sold its copyright to Sharat for five hundred rupees and died on 29 June 1873. When the Bengal Theatre opened on 16 August 1873, it presented Madhusudan's *Sharmishtha*, a play based on a love story from the Mahabharata. On 20 December 1873, the Bengal Theatre opened *Durgeshnandini*, a drama based on Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's book of the same name. Sharat acted in the role of Prince Jagat Singha and capti-

vated the audience by riding a horse onstage (111).

Bhuban Mohan Niyogi, a wealthy man of Calcutta, went to see a play in the Bengal Theatre, but could not get a ticket because the house was full. He then decided to start his own theatre and consulted with some of his friends who were connected with the business. On 31 December 1873, they inaugurated the Great National Theatre by opening the play *Kamya-kanan* (a forest of desire). Unfortunately, the gaslights in front of the stage started a fire on the opening night. The audience ran out and the play was cancelled. Discouraged, the theatre owner and actors sought help from Girish. Girish wrote a play based on Bankim's *Mrinalini*, and when it opened on 14 February 1874, he performed the role of Pashupati (112). He took no money for his work. Girish was a true worshipper of Nataraj Shiva, the presiding deity of the stage. The theatre was his altar; acting was his worship; and he gave joy to the devotees of Nataraj.

In 1875 and 1876, Girish was plunged into grief by several deaths in his family, including that of his first wife, and other troubles. Finally, at the request of his relatives and friends, he married again and this lifted his spirits. During this period Girish withdrew from acting and stopped writing plays.

When the Prince of Wales (later Edward VII) visited Calcutta in 1876, Jagadananda Mukhopadhyay, a lawyer of the Calcutta High Court, invited the prince to his home and held a special Hindu reception in his honour. This created a tremendous uproar in Calcutta. Upendranath Das wrote a satire about Jagadananda called *Gajadananda*, and Girish wrote a few songs for it. On 19 February 1876, this play was performed at the Great National Theatre. British officials were upset because it caricatured a loyal subject of the empire and, indirectly, it criticized the government. They banned its performance and introduced the Dramatic Performances Act on 25 March 1876, which stated that 'whenever the Government was of the opinion that any dramatic performance was scandalous or defamatory, or likely to excite feelings of dissatisfaction towards the Government, or likely to cause pain to any pri-

vate party in its performance, or was otherwise prejudicial to the interests of the public, the Government might prohibit such performances' (128–9). This law caused many problems for the Bengali stage, and restricted playwrights' freedom. Girish experienced the negative impact of this law when three of his plays were banned by the government.


In July 1877, Girish leased the Great National Theatre from its owner, Bhuban Mohan Niyogi, and changed its name to the National Theatre. He wrote a play based on *Meghnadbadh*, a poetical work of Michael Madhusudan Datta that describes the death of Meghnad, a heroic son of Ravana. Girish performed in the roles of Rama and Meghnad. The famous actress Binodini acted the part of Pramila, wife of Meghnad. This play became a hit (133–5).

Girish then wrote a play based on *Palasir Yud-dha*, a poetical work by Navin Chandra Sen about the Battle of Palasi, in which the British defeated the Muslim ruler Siraj-ud-Daula. Girish performed the role of Lord Clive and Binodini played the queen of England. This play had a very long run. Navin Chandra Sen came to Calcutta to attend a performance. He was very pleased by Girish's interpretation, and the two men became lifelong friends (136–7).

In the fall of 1877, Girish's first two musical dramas—*Agamani* and *Akalbodhan*—were performed in the National Theatre. Both musicals are connected with the worship of Durga. In *Agamani*, Girish described Uma's visit to her parents, and in *Akalbodhan*, Rama's worship of Durga. *Agamani* was Girish's first completely original production, and he released it under the pen name Mukut-charan Mitra (137).

When the National Theatre had become well established under Girish's leadership, a strange thing happened. His brother Atulkrishna Ghosh, a lawyer, felt apprehensive that Girish would be held responsible if the theatre failed or if it fell into debt. Because they were living as a joint family, Atulkrishna would also be responsible for the debt. For that reason, he asked his brother to either give up responsibility for the theatre or legally

separate himself from the household. Girish gave up legal and financial responsibility for the theatre, and his brother-in-law Dwarakanath Deb assumed the building's lease (137–8).

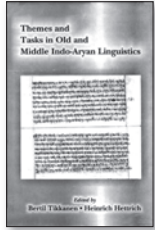
In January 1878, Kedarnath Chaudhury took over the lease from Dwarakanath and asked Girish to write plays based on Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's *Bishabriksha* (a social drama) and *Durgeshnandini* (a historical drama). Girish did so, and acted in the roles of Chandrashekhar and Jagat Singha, in the first and second plays respectively. Later several other people leased the National Theatre, but they were not successful. In 1879 Bhuban Mohan, the theatre owner, went deeply into debt, so the National Theatre was sold at auction. Pratapchand Jahuri bought it, then asked Girish to resign from his accounting job and accept a full-time job in his theatre. He offered Girish an initial salary of one hundred rupees per month, with the idea that the salary would increase as the theatre's profits improved. Observing Pratap's sincerity, enthusiasm, and practical business knowledge, Girish accepted his offer to become the manager and director of the National Theatre. Girish was then making one hundred fifty rupees per month at the Parker Company. When he went to Mr Parker with his letter of resignation, the latter was reluctant to accept it. He was very fond of Girish and asked him to continue in both jobs. He even suggested that Girish come to the office at noon, but Girish did not relent. Mr Parker finally accepted his resignation and gave him a diamond ring as a parting gift. 

## References

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4. A C Gangopadhyay, *Girishchandra*, 55.
5. Hemendra Nath Dasgupta, *Girish Pratibha* (Calcutta, 1929), 26.
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8. A C Gangopadhyay, *Girishchandra*, 65.

# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
publishers need to send **two** copies of their latest publications.



**Themes and Tasks in  
Old and Middle  
Indo-Aryan Linguistics**  
Ed. Bertil Tikkannen and  
Heinrich Hettrich

Motilal Banarsidas, 41 UA Bungalow  
Road, Jawahar Nagar, Delhi 110 062.  
2006. x + 326 pp. Rs 600.

The volume under review comprises twelve papers that were initially presented at the 12th World Sanskrit Conference (Linguistics Section) held at Helsinki in July 2003. The papers pertain to several themes: from historical phonology, morpho-syntax, and etymology of Old Indo-Aryan (OIA), to Iranian loan words and computer processing of Sanskrit texts.

The volume opens with 'The Development of Proto-Indo-Iranian [PIIr] into Sanskrit' by Masato Kobayashi wherein the earlier positions on the issue are revisited and, with ample data from Proto-Indo-European (PIE), PIIr, OIA, and Middle Indo-Aryan (MIA), the author concludes that 'the PIIr \*sć violates the criteria of phonological well-formedness in pre-Vedic Indo-Aryan with respect to contour segments'.

In 'Reflexivization in the Rig-Veda (and beyond)' Hans Henrich Hock presents more evidence from the Rig Veda to demonstrate that 'the reflexive possessive is complementary to middle voice verb inflection, marking the one constituent that cannot be expressed on the verb, namely the nominal genitive relation' and that 'the full reflexive (RV *tanū*) is indeed a very recent innovation, whose development can still be traced in the Rig-Veda'.

'On the Evolutionary Changes in the Old and Middle Indo-Aryan Systems of Case and Adpositions' by Vit Bubenik is a scholarly piece of research on the development of postpositions in MIA from what were originally adverbial particles in OIA. Vedic (and Hittite) athematic case endings—four grammatical cases (Nominative, Accusative, Genitive, Dative) and three adverbial cases (Locative, Ablative, and Instrumental)—undergo significant changes re-

sulting in shifting of the adverbial particles (*nipata*) and adpositions to postpositions in the MIA syntax of the adpositional phrase.

Erik Seldeslachts revisits the Kölver Principle proposed by the late Bernhard Kölver, which is aimed at explaining a whole series of etymologically untransparent Sanskrit and Vedic words through the phenomenon of elision of initial or final vowel, or by stem contractions and reductions. Seldeslachts believes that the neglected Kölver Principle is relevant to toponymy and onomastics and that it is an important instrument for analysis of the OIA lexicon.

In his paper 'Iranian Elements in Sanskrit', Hasan Rezai Baghbidi gives a brief historical account of the politico-administrative contact between Iran and India from the times of Cyrus and Darius to the incursions into India made by Pahlavas, Shakas, Kushanas, and Hunas. As a consequence, 'Middle Iranian words and names, especially from Eastern Middle Iranian languages (Bactrian, Khotanese, Khwarezmian, Sogdian, and the like) found their way into the spheres of administration, equitation, government, and military equipment.' The author proposes to classify Iranian elements in Sanskrit into 'loan words, loan translations, and Sanskrit words semantically influenced by their Iranian equivalents'.

Hartmut Scharfe takes a second look at the issue(s) of borrowing from Dravidian into Indo-Aryan and convincingly argues that 'the gerund is of Indo-European, not Dravidian, origin, but that its use in the sentence gradually conformed to a Dravidian pattern' in classical Sanskrit literature. Gerund-like words (similar in function but not in their morphology) are found in Homeric Greek and also perhaps in some Iranian dialects. Nominal compounds in the Vedic language are generally limited to two members. Classical Sanskrit and Pali literature contains 'monstruous' nominal compounds of enormous length. Scharfe surveys an extensive gamut of literature from Sanskrit and Tamil and comes to the conclusion that nominal compounds reflect a Dravidian influence on OIA and MIA, and that their use became a rather special characteristic of poetry to exhibit power at the cost of sweetness and clarity.

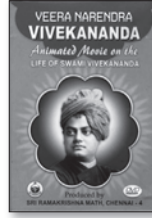
In 1943, Harold Bailey coined the term 'Gandhari' to refer to what had hitherto been known as 'North-western Prakrit' encompassing the inscriptions and literatures in Kharoshthi script including the Ashokan inscriptions at Shahbazgarhi, and the Buddhist literary texts and writings on wood, leather, and silk found at Cadota (Khotan). In 'A Preliminary Study of Gandhari Lexicography', Andrew Glass presents a brief overview of the writings now available in Gandhari and convincingly argues in favour of preparing a diachronic dictionary of Gandhari in both print and electronic formats along with the cognates in Sanskrit, Pali, Tibetan, Chinese, and other languages, wherever available. The dictionary should become a reference tool for readers of Kharoshthi script.

'Lexicon-directed Segmentation and Tagging in Sanskrit' by Gérard Huet provides an interesting account of constructing a Sanskrit lexical database from a Sanskrit to French dictionary comprising 12,500 entries, including 520 roots, 7,500 word lemmas, 2,800 compounds, and 1,300 idiomatic expressions. *Sandhis* (euphonic combinations) are generated using a two-tape transducer with two input tapes, one for storing the word-end vowels and the other for storing the initial vowels of suffixes. 'According to the interaction between the two boundary [vowel] phonemes, proper output is generated on the output tape.' Inflectional morphology involving declensions of substantives and conjugation of finite verbal forms is worked out by entering 'morphological laws for inflexion as paradigm tables'. Derivational morphology is not dealt with, for it is assumed that the corresponding entries are explicitly listed in the lexicon. Noun phrase segmentation is done by using finite-state technology. A finite-state machine 'expresses the regular relation between streams of words and the streams of phonemes issued from the (external) sandhi rewriting at their mutual juncture, and a transducer implements the inverse relation'.

The volume is a welcome addition to the understanding of some aspects of historical phonology, morpho-syntax, and lexical borrowing. The observations are based on the premise that the so-called Aryans migrated from elsewhere into North India—and so did Dravidians, claims Pinault. Gérard Huet's paper on 'Segmentation and Tagging' is especially refreshing and indicates the progress that has been made in machine translations.

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### **Veera Narendra Vivekananda: Animated Movie on the Life of Swami Vivekananda**

Ramakrishna Math, Mylapore, Chennai  
600 004. E-mail: [srkmath@vsnl.com](mailto:srkmath@vsnl.com).  
2007. 90 min. Rs 150 for 2-disc VCD format or Rs 200 for 1-disc DVD format.

As we move further into the Digital Age, the perennial wisdom is finding new vehicles through which to find its ever-widening audience. Centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission have been participating in this search for new means of transmission, bringing out digital editions of important literature, interactive CDs, and videos. The first attempts were hampered by technical snags and design flaws; gradually the quality of these productions is improving. The video under review has reached an acceptable level of quality; we trust future productions will merit higher praise.

From the sannyasa of Durgacharan Dutta, Swami Vivekananda's grandfather, through the marriage of Swami Vivekananda's parents, Swamiji's birth, boyhood, education, and discipleship with Sri Ramakrishna, to his travels as an unknown sannyasin, his going to America and triumphant return to India, and finally his founding of the Ramakrishna Mission, this animated video depicts the ancestry and life of Swami Vivekananda. It is available in six languages: English, Hindi, Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil, and Telugu. Those who know Swamiji's life will be reminded of many familiar incidents—with a new sheen, as it were: the conversations portrayed have been creatively imagined in most cases, since no exact record of them exists. The medium is surely attractive for children, and should be an effective means to introduce them to Swami Vivekananda and his message, especially since Swamiji's boyhood and youth receive extensive treatment. Adults may find the animation a bit clumsy at times. Also, historical details are embarrassingly inaccurate in places. For example, when Swamiji is portrayed standing in Chicago in 1893, motor cars are shown plying the roads; but in those days, horse carriages were the norm—the 'horseless carriage' would not be widespread for at least another decade.

This production reminds us that the message of Swami Vivekananda, of Sri Ramakrishna, of the Sanatana Dharma will continue to find new avenues for reaching the people of the world.

PB



# REPORTS

## **Ramakrishna Math Publications: Hundred Years**

From 12 to 14 April 2008, **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai**, celebrated the centenary of its publications with three different conventions for young men, young women, and the teaching fraternity. As part of the programme, Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj, Vice President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated a pictorial exhibition on the 'History of Publications of the Math' and released several popular books published at highly subsidized prices.

The dignitaries who participated in the programmes included Swami Prabhanandaji, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Smt. Revathi, Director, Tamil Nadu Organic Farmers' Movement, Dr Gururaja Karajagi, Director of Creative Teaching, Bangalore, and Dr V V Subramaniam, Former Principal, Vivekananda College, Chennai.

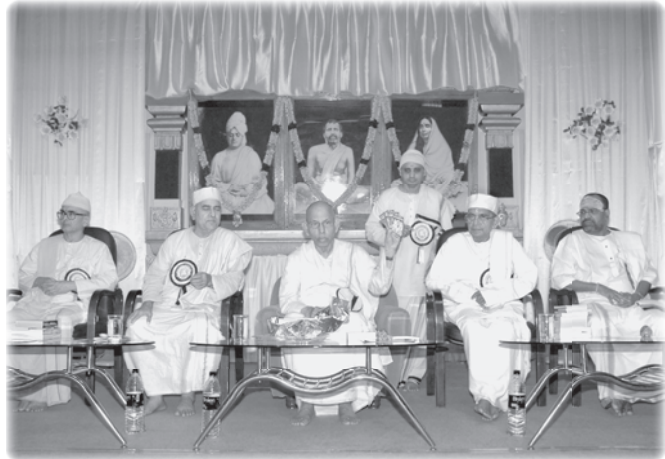
## **New School at Bhopal**

Vivekananda Vidyapith, an English medium co-education school from kindergarten to class twelve—privately managed as a unit of the erstwhile Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Bhopal—was handed over to the **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Bhopal**, on 16 April.

Swami Prabhanandaji, Swami Prameyanandaji, Swami Gautamanandaji, and Sri Babulal Gaur, Minister for Commercial Taxes, Government of Madhya Pradesh, addressed a large audience gathered for the occasion.

## **Achievements**

Students of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyamandira, Belur**, achieved excellent results at the joint admis-



*Swami Smarananandaji releasing popular books at subsidized prices during the centenary celebrations of the Publication Department, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai*

sion test for MSc courses in the various Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs). The all-India ranks secured—within the first ten—were: for general candidates, Mathematics: 1; Physics: 6; Chemistry: 2, 3, 7, and 9; for scheduled caste candidates: Physics: 1 and 5.

## **Relief**

Details of relief operations conducted by the centres of the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission during the month of April are as follows:

**Distress Relief** • Distribution of items to needy people in their respective areas: Almora: 48 blankets; Guwahati: 120 blankets; Ranchi Sanatorium: 100 saris, 82 sets of school dresses, and 5 bicycles; Cooch Behar: 6 wells dug at different villages near Mekhliganj; Sikra Kulingram: 29 deep tube wells sunk in the surrounding areas and 5 more in the Sundarbans.

**Fire Relief** • Vrindaban centre distributed 150 kg wheat flour, 20 kg rice, 24 kg dal, 60 kg potatoes, 19 l edible oil, 11 kg salt, 29 kg sugar, 10 sets of utensils (each containing 10 items), 10 dhotis, 10 saris, 35 blankets, 50 assorted garments, and 8 cots to 7 families whose houses were devastated by fire at Aila village in Mathura district and Shyam Kutir Kshetra in Vrindaban. One of the families was given roofing materials as well.

**Economic Rehabilitation** • Distribution of various items to needy people of nearby rural areas under self-employment programme: Cooch Behar: 13 rickshaws; Guwahati: 6 sewing machines and 12 sets of *talsal* (weaving equipment); Ranchi Sanatorium: 3 rickshaws.

PB